

STORIES TO TELL
AND HOW TO TELL THEM

◇ ELIZABETH CLARK ◇

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Stories to tell

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STORIES TO TELL AND
HOW TO TELL THEM



STORIES TO TELL · & HOW TO TELL THEM

BY ELIZABETH CLARK



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TO
DAVID

MY MOST CONSTANT LISTENER
WHO HEARD SO MANY STORIES
AND ALWAYS ASKED FOR MORE
I GRATEFULLY DEDICATE
THIS BOOK

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INTRODUCTION

THE CRAFT OF THE STORY-TELLER

THIS little book of stories is in part an attempt to furnish some fresh material for telling to children of about six to ten years of age. None of the stories claims to be what is known as original. All are founded on legends and scraps of folklore or history. I have re-told them because I enjoyed them—one of the very best of good reasons for telling a story—in the hope that others will enjoy them also.

The version of "The Old Woman and the Pixies and the Tulips" appears in print for the first time, as does also "The Dog-Brother of the Order of St. John," though I have often told both at schools and play-centres and as illustrations to lectures. The other eleven stories with their accompanying studies and comments have already appeared in the pages of "Child Education."

Now, as to the advice which follows each

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story. It has been written with considerable diffidence, because story-telling is such an individual affair that at first it seemed hardly possible to give any directions as to how each story should be told. Moreover, I had especially in mind the inexperienced and probably nervous Story-teller, to whom a story is apt to present itself as something to be memorised and afterwards discharged, with more or less accuracy and as much expression as anxiety will permit. To burden such with many details as to pauses, emphasis, inflections, would be only to add to their troubles. Also I am sure that "expression," in story-telling of the homely, intimate kind for which these little stories are intended, comes best and most freely when it springs from the Story-teller's own enjoyment and understanding. It cannot be dictated word by word. So I have aimed at establishing a bond of friendship and intimacy between Story-teller and story, believing that this is the surest road to remembering and telling with freedom and delight.

Freedom and delight!—these are the birth-right of the story. For consider: we are all story-tellers at times. Do we not all love to recount our own experiences—especially the more distressing and grievous ones—to all who will

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listen? Some of us, it is true, tell with more vivacity than others. Some of us have a greater gift of words. But on the whole, to the average person, story-telling "comes natural" when applied to personal experience. And we enjoy it. It is not the alarming and burdensome affair that it sometimes appears, when "tell me a story" must be complied with. On the contrary, in this, its primitive form, the story comes easily and frequently—too easily and too frequently our listeners sometimes think.

Now, why is this? Why do even those of us who believe themselves utterly incapable of telling stories nevertheless find no difficulty in holding forth upon personal experiences? The reason, I think, is threefold, and each part will be found to have a bearing upon the craft of the Story-teller.

The first reason seems too simple for statement, but it lies at the very root of all good story-telling. First and foremost: we *want* to tell. Others may not always want to hear, but we want to tell. Our experiences are important to us and we are determined to share them. In fact we are *interested* in our stories, in what they say to us, in what we mean them to say to others. And because it is *our* story, because we are so

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interested, the other two reasons follow of themselves. We remember so clearly and we see so plainly.

We remember so clearly. Nobody knows the details of that particular absurdity, surprise, thrill, or grievance so well as do we to whom it happened. We have all the facts at our finger-ends. And we see so plainly. The scene passes again before our mind's eye; we watch as we tell and the experience unrolls before us like a picture.

In fact, to sum up: we have a living interest in our story and a complete command of the essential details, and spontaneously the narrative breaks forth in words.

Can we apply these principles to the art of story-telling—or as I would rather call it, the craft of story-telling—to the stories we so often need to tell and feel so unsure about telling? I think we can.

First, as to the question of interest. *Let us start with the intention of always having an interest, a personal share, in the story.* Wise Story-tellers will, as far as possible, choose a tale for their own delight—no less than for the pleasure of the children. They will refuse a story which does not appeal to them. More-

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over, they will not be content vaguely to define the story chosen as a "nice story," but they will look to see what it is that calls, what spirit of laughter, gaiety, beauty, joy, adventure, it may be, that they are going to share and give out as the story unfolds. For the more clearly we see what the story gives us, the better shall we express it in the telling. Of course all stories that please us are not suited to the children, that goes without saying. And here it is well to remember that telling heightens the effect of any story. It becomes more vivid, more personal, more intimate, and real. So it is wise to beware of the too exciting story which may turn to a nightmare and of the too-harrowing or sentimental story which may reduce some sensitive little soul to tears.

"But," somebody may say, "there are not too many stories that appeal to me. What am I to do when I am obliged to tell one in which I cannot feel an interest, because of the children's insistence, the needs of the situation (as in the case of familiar and seemingly threadbare stories of history), or because a sugar-coated pill is needed to convey information or a moral?"

In the first case: when dealing with stories that children love and ask for again and again till the

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poor Story-teller is wearied with telling, it often happens that we have unconsciously looked on these as "only silly stories for children" from the beginning of our acquaintance, and by so doing have closed the door on further discovery and friendship. But it is always worth while to put oneself in the child's place—to look at the story with a child's eyes and thereby to see just where the attraction is. Occasionally we shall ban a story, but for the most part to see is to share. I am always glad that my acquaintance with the Tale of a Turnip (page 53) started on those lines. I began (with a rather bald version of the story) by laughing at the valiant efforts of that *queer* little family. I went on to enjoy in detail the pictures they gave me. I ended by being firm friends with that *dear* little family, all living together in kindness and that "unity of spirit which is the bond of peace." In fact my interest was like the Turnip itself, for "it grew and it grew and it grew," and so will any interest that is honestly and firmly grounded.

Next, as to the familiar story which must be told because it is one of the great stories of the world. This is usually some historical tale or some Bible story. The latter, as most of us will sadly admit, is only too apt to become

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formal and stereotyped with use. There is neither time nor space here to discuss such stories in detail, but it is obvious that the fault lies, not in the story, but in our own dulled vision. The remedy lies in trying to see them afresh, through careful preparation, and I have always found it helpful to remember that all such stories really stand against a great background, which we need to realise before we can feel the story. There is always a much greater story of which our own little story is only a part. These stories have often become to us—like branches broken away from some great tree—dry and dead and sere. Stand back and see the branch as part of the living tree and see the wonder and the beauty of it. It is Wonder that we need.

Finally, as to the sugar-coated pill. If it is that and nothing more, then it is a very poor story, and poor stories ought not to be told. What is not good enough for us is most certainly not good enough for the children. If told it must be, let us hope that enthusiasm for the information or moral to be administered will shine through the poor shell and give us something to share in spite of feeble words and trivial happenings. But it should not be necessary to use such stories.

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So much, then, for the question of our interest, and now as to grasping and handling the material of the story. Remember, we need the facts at our finger-ends—the pictures before our mind's eye.

It is here that systematic, intelligent preparation comes in, and many of us do not do enough of that. Some of us sit down with grim determination to learn the story by heart. Some of us with quick memories read the story once or twice and are satisfied that we know it. And neither method is what we need. The first gives us the words and the words only. If we lose them, we are lost indeed. The second gives us merely a shallow impression of the facts. We gain little, consequently we have little to give.

Really, of course, we shall have done much of our preparation in thinking over our story, in considering its appeal, in making friends with it, in fact. One does not readily forget the ways and words of a friend. But it is necessary to have a firm hold on facts, to be able to call to mind quickly and clearly the events which are the structure of the story. It is a good plan at this stage to take pencil and paper and jot down the outline as briefly as possible, reducing the story to its ground-plan and then to make sure

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of that. And all the time we are making sure (in other words, memorising), our friendly understanding with the story will be beside us, watching, illuminating, emphasising, revealing, making dry bones live. So, presently, details will slip into place, the facts will grow, as they should, to pictures, especially if we take our time and watch each event as it happens. Sometimes one stops and considers as to "where and how" till a picture becomes convincingly clear, for the Story-teller must not doubt or hesitate over the story when it comes to telling. We must be sure, in order that those who listen may be comfortably and contentedly sure also. We must be able to find our way about our little Commonwealth till it is as familiar to our mind's eye as the scenes of our own experience. Personally, I find that this visualisation is not so much a matter of what is called "imagination" as is generally supposed. A good deal of it is just common sense, affectionately applied to the story.

Last of all comes the stage of trying over words—telling the story to ourselves or scribbling it on odd bits of paper, no matter how illegibly, since the draft is not for reference but for experiment. Nothing tests our grasp of a story so well as putting it into words. Nothing shows us so clearly what

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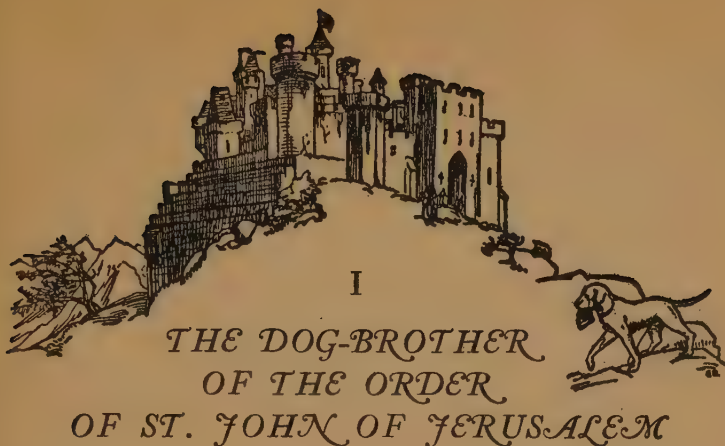
steps we have left out, where the thread is tangled or the conversation lame when it should be direct and clear. It is a troublesome business, there is no denying it, and one is often tempted to shirk, but it is absolutely necessary. A story is never our own till we have set it forth in words. Sometimes, of course, this final stage consists not in finding, but in learning the words by heart, as in the case of a "Just-So Story." No others will do. But whether the words are of our own shaping or are provided for us, we need to try them over till they come freely and surely.

And now we are ready to tell. One word of advice about this: we Story-tellers must look and sound as if we enjoyed the story. It is true this sometimes seems difficult. There are days when, as Mr. Jarndyce would say, "the wind is in the east," when the children are restless, we are tired, head-achy, or nervous—but if we are friends with our story we can meet them all. Just a moment to remember that the story really *is* a friend, and then we summon up our courage, take the plunge, and begin—not as a task, not half-heartedly, but with good-will and the knowledge that we have something dear and pleasant which it is our happy fortune to share. It is not just *a* story—it is *our* story; and the children

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will meet us half-way and make it theirs too, be very sure of that.

The stories in this little book have been good friends of mine, and I hope that some of them may be good friends also to any Story-teller who may find them. May happiness go with them!



HERE is an old story and a true one; it happened in the year 1426. So you can tell for yourself just how old it is! It is the story of a dog. I am afraid his name has been forgotten, but he was a real dog—a great hound, with a smooth dark coat and long drooping ears. His home was in a castle. It was a very great and strong castle that stood high on a rocky cliff above the blue Mediterranean Sea (for the story happened far away from here in the country that we call Asia Minor now). It had been built by the Knights of St. John to be a place of safety—a stronghold, as it was called. There had been war for more than 300 years between the Christians and the Turks, and none had fought more bravely in that war than the Knights of St.

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John. Year after year men came from all the noble families of Europe and joined the Knights and promised to give their lives to fight against the Turks. Many were killed, but there were always more to come, to guard Europe and to hold back the Tartars from the east and the Turks from the south who would have liked to take the rich lands round the Mediterranean for their own.

The castle I am telling you of stood not far from the country of the Turks. It had been built as a place of refuge for the Christian prisoners whom the Turks sometimes took in battle and kept as slaves and treated very cruelly. So it was made a very strong castle; "seven walls there were on the landward side and seven ramparts on the seaward side," says the old story. Over the gateway of the castle was carved: "Except the Lord keep the House, his labour is but lost that buildeth," and it was called St. Peter of the Freed, because it was for men to come to and be free.

Many slaves did escape to the castle, and were cared for, and sent safely back to their homes. But some who tried to reach it lost their way among the hills and mountains which they had to cross, and died of hunger and cold and weariness. And this is where we come to the story of

The Dog-Brother of St. John of Jerusalem

the dog, for he had a share in helping the slaves as you shall hear. The good Brothers of St. John (they were sometimes called Brothers as well as Knights) trained hounds to go out into the mountains to search for lost travellers and to guide them safely to the castle. Our dog was one of these—and now at last we are coming to the story.

One day a man—his name was Francisco—escaped from his Turkish master and started on his journey through the mountain-country to reach St. Peter of the Freed. He hurried as fast as he was able, because he was terribly afraid of being caught. He knew his master would come after him with men on horseback, who could go faster than he could, and if he was taken he would be beaten and cruelly punished, perhaps even killed. So, as he ran, he looked for a place to hide, where he could be safe until they were tired of searching for him—a cave in the rocks, a tree to climb, or a village where people would be kind and help him. But there seemed no caves, no trees—and there were no villages, for all the people had been driven away by the Turks.

Francisco was beginning to feel very tired and frightened, when, as he hurried along, he

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came to a place among the mountains where once there had been a village, but now there were only broken-down walls and ruined houses. He ran in and out among them, looking for a hiding-place, but nowhere seemed safe till he came to a hole in the ground which looked deep and dark. By this time he was so frightened (because he was sure he could hear men coming),



that he did not wait to see how deep it was, but caught hold of the edge and dropped. He fell quite a long way — the hole was much deeper than he thought, for it

had been a well, though fortunately there was no longer any water in it. But he was not hurt and he felt very glad to be so safely hidden, for as he crouched there at the bottom of the well he could hear the sound of horses' hoofs and men talking and shouting. He knew that it was his master's servants and that he had been only just in time.

They went all through the ruined village,

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calling to each other as they searched, but no one thought of looking in the well, and at last they went away to follow the path still further into the mountains.

Francisco stayed where he was, for he knew they would return that way: presently he heard them coming back, very angry because they had not found him. And this time they went straight through the village and he heard the sound of their horses' hoofs die away in the distance.

Then he said to himself, "Now I will climb out and make my way to the castle of St. Peter of the Freed, and the good Brothers of St. John will keep me safe and send me back to my home," and he was just as glad as you or I would be! So he began to try to climb the side of the well. But it was much harder than he expected: it was steep and slippery, there seemed no place to put his foot, nothing for his hands to hold to. He tried again and again, all round the walls of the well. Sometimes he climbed a little way, but each time he slipped and fell, till at last he was tired out, so tired that he fell asleep. When he woke it was night, and the great bright stars were shining. He was stiff and sore and aching, but he tried

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again and again till at last he was quite sure. Poor Francisco! the well was so steep, that unless someone let down a rope to him he could never get out, and who could come to help him in that lonely place! After all, he thought, he would never go home, as he had hoped; and I think he was very frightened and very miserable.

The night went by and day came and presently Francisco heard a pattering and then a scratching and snuffing at the mouth of the well. Then he saw the head of some animal that was looking down into the well. It was a great dog! Francisco thought some hunter or shepherd must be near and he called and shouted—but no one came, and presently the big dog trotted away, and Francisco felt even more frightened and lonely than before, because he really had begun to hope a little. So the day passed and night came and by now he was terribly hungry. He knew if no help came he must soon die. But for fear lest you should think the story is going to be a sad one, I will tell you now, that help did come, but not quite in the way that I think you expect.

For when morning came, Francisco heard the quick-pattering feet again and saw the great dog looking down into the well, but this time it

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carried something in its mouth. And it dropped what it carried into the well. It was a piece of meat! Now you and I would not like that meat—for it was raw meat—it was the dog's own breakfast. But Francisco was so hungry that he ate it and was glad and his strength came back. He knew he would not die of hunger that day. And after that, day by day the great dog came to the well bringing a piece of meat, and it kept Francisco alive.



But in the castle of St. Peter of the Freed, the good Brothers of St. John were troubled about one of their dogs, who would not eat his food, but always picked it up and trotted away with it. No one knew where he went, but they were sure he did not eat it, for he was growing thin and his coat was rough. They were afraid the dog was ill, and it troubled them because they loved their dogs. So one day some of the Brothers followed

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to see where he went. And he went a long, long way, up rocky hillsides, down mountain valleys, and along steep narrow paths, till he came to a place where once there had been a village but now there were only broken-down walls and ruined houses. They saw the dog go trotting in and out among the ruins, till he stopped at what looked like a deep hole and dropped the meat he was carrying down into it. Then they ran to the hole and leaned over it to look what was there, and heard a faint voice calling—and they knew there was a man in the hole! So they called to him that help was coming and one stayed by the well, so that Francisco might not feel he was left all alone, while the others hurried back across the mountains and brought a strong rope. They lowered a man down into the well, and he put his arms round Francisco and held him safe (because he was very weak and could not hold the rope for himself), and they were pulled out of the well together. Then they carried Francisco back to the castle of St. Peter of the Freed, and nursed and cared for him till he was able to go safely home.

But when the Chronicler of the Order of the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem heard what the dog had done, he took the great book in which

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all the history (or chronicles) of the Order was written. It was a great book bound in leather, with clasps of brass and crackling pages of parchment, and on those pages in thick black writing were all the stories of the noble doings of the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem. And the Chronicler took his pen, and he dipped it in the ink and wrote—he wrote the story of the



dog. And if anyone had said to him, "Why do you write the story of a dog, among the deeds of the Knights of the great Order of St. John of Jerusalem?" I think he would have said, "Surely, he too is worthy to be called a Brother of our Order, for he too went out into the wilderness and gave all that he had, that he might seek and save that which was lost."

And that is why I have called this story "The

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Story of the Dog-Brother of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem."

COMMENTS ON THE STORY

The outline of the story is, as I have said, quite true. The castle of St. Peter of the Freed, its purpose and description, are matters of actual history, and mention of the fugitive in the well and of the dog who fed him is on record. I have only tried to fill in a little and to tell the tale as it probably happened. There is a parallel case of a Scottish sheep-dog which fed a child (who had fallen into a pit, or steep hollow, among the mountains) with its own share of food.

In telling a true story, it is always a good plan to find the locality on a map—the larger the better. The story becomes more clear and definite as its place is fixed, since the story-teller, noting contours, coastlines, mountains, rivers, and so forth, is able to evoke some picture of the surroundings and to set the tale against a clear and living background, instead of a vague hazy impression. The Castle of St. Peter stood "on the ruins of Helicarnassus on the Gulf of Caria." A glance at the map of the Roman Empire or the journeys of St. Paul will show the place.

The Dog-Brother of St. John of Jerusalem

The story of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem is one of the most splendid chronicles of Christendom. I have tried to give a glimpse of the courage and devotion of the Brotherhood, because this story is not just the story of a noble dog, but is part of a great epic of dedication and endurance. The story-teller should know and feel something of this. There is a tale of a Knight of St. John in "A Book of Golden Deeds" (Charlotte M. Yonge), which is not only a thrilling (that much over-worked word) story, but which gives a very good short account of the Order. Much more information and some wonderful stories can be found in two volumes of the Story of the Nations, "The Barbary Corsairs" and "The Ottoman Empire."

Stories of the type of "The Dog-Brother" need to be seen in perspective, as it were. Just as a detail of a design gains in meaning and value by being considered in relation to the whole, so true stories have a deeper and fuller interest as they are seen as part of a great whole, imbued with the same great spirit.

Beyond this, two things are specially necessary, I think, in telling such a story. One is complete assurance as to facts and details. The story should be "at one's finger-ends" and come

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without hesitation, clearly and convincingly. The other is a sympathetic realisation of the story. The Story-teller must really share its anxieties, perils, adventures, must see them and live them. Otherwise a story of this kind may very easily become a category of facts, linked together by "and," "so" and "then"—told haltingly and uncertainly.

Even so, the child one tells it to, usually asks for this type of story again and again. I am really thinking more of the unfortunate Story-teller, who is labouring heavily, bored, and dissatisfied with self and story. I have learned—by experience!—that a little extra time spent on really intelligent and *methodical* preparation, on planning and seeing the story, coupled with a determination to take the plunge and tell the story with a will, can make the telling a pleasure instead of a toil to oneself, and a twofold delight to the child.



II

THE TALE OF THE TALKATIVE TORTOISE

MR. and Mrs. Duck were sitting in the nice cool grass at the edge of a pool, tidying their brown feathers (they were wild ducks and wild ducks are brown) with their yellow beaks and talking quietly and comfortably before they went to sleep.

It was a nice pool in a little valley among the hills. There was green grass round it, and little pink and white and yellow flowers grew in the grass, and there were slugs and snails to eat and fish in the pool. Mr. and Mrs. Duck had been most comfortable there. But they were not feeling very happy just now, because—there

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was no doubt about it—the pool was drying up. Every day there was a little more mud and a little less water, the rushes were beginning to look brown, and the grass looked thirsty. Soon there would not be enough water for Mr. and Mrs. Duck to swim in. “We shall have to move away, I am afraid,” said Mrs. Duck with a sad little quack.

“Yes,” said Mr. Duck, “it looks like it. We shall have to fly over the hill and find another pool. That is easy to do. The thing that troubles me is the Tortoise. What will *he* do with no one to talk to?”

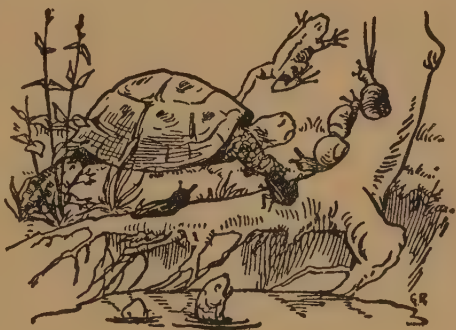
“Yes, that is quite true,” said Mrs. Duck, with a tear in her little bright, black eye, for she was a kind-hearted creature; “he will be terribly lonely.”

I had better explain about the Tortoise. He was only a very little tortoise who lived in the soft mud of the pool. Sometimes he buried himself and slept for weeks; perhaps it was because he had such long, long sleeps that he talked so much when he was awake, for he certainly was a terrible talker—and so proud! Just because he had a hard shell on his back, he despised the frogs with their soft skins, and was so rude to the fishes that if they put their heads

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out and saw him, they pulled them in again. As for the slugs and snails and beetles—he simply pretended they were not there.

So, for want of anyone better, he used to talk to himself for hours together—until Mr. and Mrs. Duck came to the pool. He found them most kind and amiable, and able to tell him of so many places and such wonderful things, that actually he began to listen sometimes instead of talking quite so much and despising everyone but himself.



Still, it was generally the Tortoise who talked, sitting in the mud at the edge of the pool on cool evenings, while Mr. and Mrs. Duck swam about and said “quack” softly every now and then. They were good listeners. “And of course, my dear,” Mr. Duck used to say, “if the poor fellow talks *too* much we can just take a flight and exercise our wings a little for a change.” (Just as you or I would say,

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"I am tired of being indoors; I will go for a walk.")

And away they would go for an hour or two, and the Tortoise was always very glad to see them come back.

But this was different. This meant going away for a long time—perhaps for always—and when they told the Tortoise about it he was terribly unhappy and actually cried; and if you look at a tortoise and see how dry and wrinkled he is, you can see what a lot it would take to make him *cry*.

"Can't I go with you?" he used to say every evening after that when they talked of going. The pool was getting terribly small; they would certainly have to go soon; but it seemed absurd to think of his going with them. It worried their kind hearts. Till suddenly, one day Mr. Duck said to Mrs. Duck, "I believe we could do it!"

"What is it, dear?" said Mrs. Duck, looking at him affectionately, with her little black eye. (Ducks are *very* affectionate.)

"I believe we could *carry* him," said Mr. Duck. "He has strong teeth and a remarkably tough neck, almost like leather, and if he held on to a piece of stick with his teeth, you and I

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could each take an end of it, and we could carry him between us!"

"If only he *did* hold on," said Mrs. Duck. "You know how fond he is of talking, and I don't believe he could ever keep his mouth shut." And you will see—just as plainly as Mrs. Duck did—that it is quite impossible to hold on to a stick with your teeth and open your mouth to talk at the same time.

"Well," said Mr. Duck, "I will talk to him, and we can but try."

So they explained their plan to the Tortoise, and he was delighted. And all that evening, as Mr. and Mrs. Duck swam about on the pool (it was hardly more than a puddle by this time), the Tortoise sat in the mud and talked of the wonderful journey, and told them how quiet he could be if he tried.

Very early next morning Mr. Duck went to look for a nice piece of stick, and presently he came back with one just the right thickness and just the right length. The Tortoise took hold in the middle, the Ducks took hold of each end. "Ready?" said Mr. Duck. "Keep your mouth *shut*," said Mrs. Duck. The Tortoise winked both eyes hard to show that he heard. Mr. and Mrs. Duck spread their strong wings and away

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they went. Higher and higher they rose, the little pool shone in the sunlight far below them and over the hills and far away flew Mr. and Mrs. Duck with friend Tortoise hanging between them.

“Quack?” Mr. Duck would say now and again. (Ducks can quack without opening their bills.) “Quack, quack,” Mrs. Duck would say, and the Tortoise would wink his eyes to show he heard them and was quite safe and comfortable. It all sounds so pleasant that I am really sorry to have to tell you the end of the story.

By and by they came in sight of a village. “A little higher, my dear,” said Mr. Duck; “there might be boys with stones there,” and “Quack, quack,” said Mrs. Duck. At the sound of their voices a little boy looked up and called to another boy. “Oh! look! *look!* the ducks are carrying a tortoise”; and the other boy said, “Oh, look, look, look!” and his sister heard him, and she called, “Oh, look, look, look!” and their Mother heard them, and she called to her next-door neighbour, “Oh, look, look, look look!” till the village was full of people all pointing and laughing and saying, “Look, look, look!”

It hurt friend Tortoise’s feelings terribly. He

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blinked his eyes and nearly choked with rage. "Quack," said Mrs. Duck soothingly. "Quack, quack," said Mr. Duck sharply, which meant "Keep quiet"; but it was too late. "Silly creatures," shrieked the Tortoise, and I don't know how much more he meant to say, but oh dear! oh dear! he had opened his mouth and let go the stick!

Mr. and Mrs. Duck flapped steadily on, but the Tortoise was gone—down and down he fell till he landed in somebody's garden, and there he had to stay, with no one but frogs and toads



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and slugs and snails and beetles to talk to for the rest of his life, and very dull he found it. His kind friends, Mr. and Mrs. Duck, could never come back to fetch him; there were too many people in the village who would have liked roast duck for dinner.

I am sorry for the Tortoise. His sad story has been handed down to all the members of the Tortoise family, as a warning not to talk too much; and if you have ever met a tortoise you will know



that he is a very quiet creature now, and seldom, if ever, makes a sound.

COMMENTS ON THE STORY

The original of the story is an old Indian fable. It really deals with two geese and a tortoise, but ducks seem more friendly creatures. So for story-telling purposes, the geese have become ducks, and the tortoise a small fellow of suitable size.

The Tale of the Talkative Tortoise

The story is said to have been told by a wise man to a very talkative king, and the moral is obvious. But I have not told the story only to point a moral, but rather to give some pleasant pictures and some laughter; and perhaps also with them a little seed of wisdom may be planted: that "there is a time to speak, and a time to be silent."

Now, if we are going to make others see pleasant pictures, it is necessary that we should first see them ourselves. So let your mind's eye dwell on that little pool among the hills, "a pool whose pure water reflected every image like a mirror," which I think, like all hill-pools, must have had its green border of rushes and turf starred with gay small flowers.

Watch Mr. and Mrs. Duck come winging, sharp and clear, against the sky, to the little pool among the quiet hills; and see little friend Tortoise sitting on the sun-cracked mud, his long leathery neck stretched out, talking without ceasing to his friends as they swim about the pool in the evening light. *See* the story, scene by scene, not necessarily in detail, but when you have grasped the facts try to let it "come alive" and happen before your mind's eye, and enjoy it as you watch. Enter into it, and be one with the various actions from start to finish.

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As to the conversations, no violent mimicry is needed; it is not necessary to quack with absolute realism! In fact it is not advisable to overdo this detail, lest the children should think that there alone lies the humour of the story, and should so be distracted from the real gleams of fun over the talkative tortoise and his exodus from the pool and exit from the story. But the "quacks" should be given with feeling and expression—kindly quacks from Mrs. Duck, commanding and interrogatory from Mr. Duck. Translate them into your own speech, and you will see how they ought to sound.

The final scene needs careful visualising and handling. The various exclamations should be practised, and so spoken as to convey a growing excitement, so that there is a picture before the children of a hurrying, chattering, pointing crowd, big and little folk alike, looking up and laughing, watching the queer little tortoise as he hangs from his stick—and then the fall.

In the original poor friend Tortoise was dashed to pieces on a rock, but that seemed too sad a climax. So I have made him fall into the soft mould of a garden and end his days—safe, but dull.



III

A TALE OF ROBIN REDBREAST¹

VERY long ago a little band of monks travelled to Brittany. They came from a pleasant country of wide wheatfields and woods and meadows, where they lived with other monks in a great abbey with a beautiful church. Leonore, their leader, had heard that far to the West was a strange, wild land, with a rocky coast, so that few ships landed there, and inland were only forests and moorland covered with furze and

¹The source of this story was, as I have explained, a brief account in French, of a very old Breton legend. Consequently I accepted St. Leonore as being of Frankish origin. I have since learned that he came from Britain, but it has seemed best to let the story stand as I first told it.

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heather and great grey stones. The people of that land were poor folks who worshipped cruel gods and knew nothing of God or His love. Then Leonore said to himself, "There are many in my own pleasant country who know God and who can teach and preach. I will go to that wild land of the West and teach the people there."

So one day he and a few friends said good-bye to the other monks, to the church and woods and fields, and they turned their faces westwards and set out on the long journey that led to Brittany. There was no road to go by—this story happened long before most of the roads we know were made—but every night as they watched the sun set, Leonore and his companions said, "Over there, where the sun goes down, is the land to which we are going"; and they travelled steadily westward.

As they went the land grew wilder. They left the wheatfields far behind, then the meadows and little villages. They passed through great old forests of oak, beech, and twisted thorn trees, where there were robbers, and where sometimes they heard wolves howling as they lay down to sleep at night. But neither wolves nor robbers harmed them, and they passed safely through the forest land.

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Then the trees became smaller and farther apart, and slanted as if they were always being blown by a great wind; and at last there were no more trees at all, and Leonore and his companions found themselves on the edge of a wild, beautiful open place. Far and wide it lay, golden and brown with bracken; there were patches of



yellow furze in bloom and great stretches of purple heather with the wind whispering among its bells. And looking still farther westwards, they saw tall grey rocks tumbled and piled together, and beyond them the blue sky met the blue sea.

Then Leonore said, "Here is the land of the farthest West, and here we will stay and teach the people."

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So on the edge of the moor, by the side of a little clear, brown stream, they built themselves a rough hut of logs from the forest, and thatched it with rushes, and laid dry fern for beds. Then they gathered together the grey rocks and stones and built a little church, and by the side of it they set up a tall cross of wood.

Very soon the little wild things of the forest and moorland learned to know Leonore and his friends and to love them. The birds watched them with their bright eyes and chirped and called to each other, especially the robins, who were never tired of keeping them company and would sing to them as they worked; for, as everyone knows who has ever had a garden, of all birds the robin is the most friendly to man.

There were not very many people in that wild country, and those who were there were terribly poor. They lived by hunting and fishing, and gathering wild nuts and fruits; and they told Leonore how, when winter came and the great winds and storms, there were many days when the sea was too wild for their poor little boats, and so there were no fish to be had and the people were almost starved. Often as he listened Leonore thought of the wheatfields of his own land, and the barns full of wheat, laid up against the winter, and

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said to himself, "If only these poor folks had wheat!" But the wheatfields were far away, and there was no way of sending a messenger through all that wild and dangerous country.

One day, as Leonore prayed and longed to help, the thought came to him, "God gives all things as His people are ready for them; if we make ready He will surely give." So the next day he called his friends together and said, "Let us prepare a place to plant our wheat," and he told them of the thought that had come to him. I think some of them were puzzled, and some a little inclined to laugh; it seemed so strange to make a field when they had nothing to plant in it.

But they loved Leonore dearly, and knew how wise and good he was. So they cut and burned away the heather and furze and bracken from a little space of ground; and with wooden spades and sharp sticks they turned and dug the soft black earth and piled a wall of stones round the little field till at last it was ready—a little cleared place on the edge of the moorland, by the side of the tall wooden cross. Then they gathered together and Leonore asked God to bless the little field and send seed to make it fruitful.

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I think they were sad and lonely. It was very near Christmas: the wind blew cold from the stormy grey sea, there was a sprinkling of snow on the moor, the bracken was dead and brown, the heather was withered, only the prickly furze was still green with a yellow blossom here and there. Even Leonore felt sad as he thought



how far away they had come from their friends and the pleasant fields and country that they knew.

"The field is ready," whispered the monks to each other, "but where is the seed?"

Then suddenly as they stood there came a quick twittering, a rush and flutter of little wings, and a robin flew by them and perched upon the arm of the cross, carrying a long golden wheat straw in his beak.

"Look at the straw," said one; "does Friend Robin think that Christmas-tide is the time to build his nest?" But as he spoke Friend Robin

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opened his beak and sang, loud and sweet and clear, and the straw that he carried came fluttering to the ground to the feet of Leonore; and it was not just an empty wheat-straw but a well-filled ear of wheat!

And Leonore smiled at his friends and said, "See, the field is ready, and God has sent the seed!"

So they planted every grain, and when spring came there was a tiny patch of green wheat in the little field; and because of love and care and the good black earth, the wheat-ears were full and strong. And the grain from them was saved and planted again, and before many years were past there was wheat and to spare in the land of the West, and the people were fed.

And the story has never been forgotten, for still, if you go to Brittany and wonder at the great fields of wheat, the country-people will tell you of the faithful St. Leonore, to whom long



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and long ago little Friend Robin Redbreast was sent by God to bring to His people His good gift of daily bread.

COMMENTS ON THE STORY

The story is adapted from a Breton legend found in the *Dictionnaire des Superstitions* of M. du Chusel. It is one of the many stories of Robin Redbreast (or *Rouge-gorge*, as he is called), all breathing the same spirit of cheerful and affectionate companionship.

This is one of the stories that should "go quietly"; there is not much action and very little conversation. The heart of the story lies in the contrast between the peace and security of the life St. Leonore and his companions gave up and the apparent bareness and poverty of that which they embraced that they might give help to those in need. Therefore it is necessary really to see and feel, as far as possible, the scenes of the story: the peaceful community among fields and villages, where order and security reigned; the long hazardous journey to an unknown goal; the dark forests; the strange, beautiful, wild country. Try to let your hearers feel in your voice the regret at leaving, the fear and

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strangeness, the newness and roughness of the life to which the monks came. Do not be afraid to alter the words a little or to amplify them to express your seeing, and when you come to the actual work of building, stone-gathering, and to the coming and going of the little wild things of moor and forest, become more vigorous, clear, and incisive. Formerly you were asking listeners to *look*; now you are also showing *action*, and the interest it brings. Let each detail stand out clearly, pause a little, and emphasise.

Then comes perplexity. Such big things: waves and storms, rock-bound coasts, bare land and poverty-stricken people, disheartened comrades. What could one man do? Then the relief, the gleam of light, the simplicity of understanding faith. And once more, vigorous action. See it all and share it. And again a picture: the cold, bare, snow-sprinkled moor, the little new-turned field and grey winter sky, and then the surprise, the quick rush of wings and flash of colour, scarlet breast and golden wheat-straw, and trill of song; the saint's gratitude and understanding, and the simple, faithful use of the little heaven-sent gift.

Pause slightly here: the story is really finished, but it is a story of the past which still lives in

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grateful memory. And so you tell the children. It is the kind of ending children love, just as they do "they lived happily ever after" of the fairy-tale. The story is *not* ended, for it goes on and lives, even to our own time, in those wide cornfields that sprang, as the legend says, from Robin Redbreast's Christmas gift. You are left, still looking at a picture, not of the far-distant past but *now*, in our own day; looking contentedly together, remembering "our daily bread."



IV

THE TALE OF A TURNIP

ONCE upon a time there was a little old Man, and a little old Woman his wife, and a little Girl their grandchild, and a little black-and-white Cat, and a little Mouse (that lived where nobody knew but only the little black-and-white Cat): and they all lived together in a little house.

One day the little old Man said to the little old Woman his wife, "I'm going out to the field to plant a seed," and she said, "What kind of a seed?" and he said, "A turnip seed." So the

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little old Man went out to the field, and he dug a little hole, and he put in a seed (and it *was* a turnip seed), and he went back to the house and said to the little old Woman, "I've planted it!" And they both said, "We hope it will grow."

And it did grow. The sun shone and the wind blew and the rain rained, and a little green shoot



came out of the ground, and it grew, and it grew, and it grew, and it grew, till it grew to a very big turnip (as big as this!). So one day when it was grown (as big as this) the little

old Man said to the little old Woman his wife, "Put the pot on the fire and boil some water, and mind it's a big pot, for I'm going to pull up the turnip and we'll all have turnip soup."

So the little old Woman made up the fire and took the biggest pot she had and filled it with water, and put it on the fire to boil the water to

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make the turnip soup. And the little old Man went out to the field and he caught hold of the turnip, and he pulled, and he pulled, and he pulled, and he *pulled*, but he couldn't pull up the turnip.

So the little old Man called to the little old Woman his wife, "Come and take hold of me, that we may pull up the turnip."

So the little old Woman his wife left the pot boiling on the fire, and she came running out of the house; and the little old Woman his wife had hold of the little old Man her husband, and the little old Man her husband had hold of the turnip; and they pulled, and they pulled, and they pulled, and they *pulled*, but they couldn't pull up the turnip.

So the little old Woman his wife called to the little Girl their grandchild and said, "Come and take hold of me, that we may pull up the turnip."

So the little Girl their grandchild came running out of the house; and the little Girl the grandchild had hold of the little old Woman the grandmother, and the little old Woman the grandmother had hold of the little old Man her husband, and the little old Man her husband had hold of the turnip; and they pulled, and

they pulled, and they pulled, and they *pulled*, but they couldn't pull up the turnip.

So the little Girl the grandchild called to the little black-and-white Cat, and said, "Come and take hold of me, that we may pull up the turnip."

So the little black-and-white Cat came running out of the house (with its tail in the air, as little cats do when they're pleased); and the little black-and-white Cat had hold of the little Girl the grandchild, and the little Girl the grandchild had hold of the little old Woman the grandmother, and the little old Woman the grandmother had hold of the little old Man her husband, and the little old Man her husband had hold of the turnip; and they pulled, and they pulled, and they pulled, and they *pulled*, but they couldn't pull up the turnip.

So the little black-and-white Cat called to the little Mouse (that lived where nobody knew but only the little black-and-white Cat) and said, "Come and take hold of me, that we may pull up the turnip."

So the little Mouse *popped* out of its hole (that nobody knew but only the little black-and-white Cat); and the little Mouse had hold of the little black-and-white Cat, the little black-and-white Cat had hold of the Girl the grandchild,

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the little Girl the grandchild had hold of the little old Woman the grandmother, and the little old Woman the grandmother had hold of the little old Man her husband, and the little old Man her husband had hold of the turnip; and they pulled, and they pulled, and they pulled, and they pulled, and *up* came the turnip! But the little old Man fell over on top of the little old Woman his wife, and the little old Woman his wife fell over on top of the little Girl the grandchild, and the little Girl the grandchild fell over on top of the little black-and-



white Cat, and the little black-and-white Cat fell over on top of the little Mouse (that lived where nobody knew but only the little black-and-white Cat), and on top of them all was the turnip!

But nobody was hurt, and it was a very good turnip, and it made very good turnip soup. There was enough for the little old Man, and the little old Woman his wife, and the little Girl

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the grandchild and the little black-and-white Cat, *and* the little Mouse (that lived where nobody knew but only the little black-and-white Cat)—and there was enough left over for the person who told the story!

COMMENTS ON THE STORY

I had better begin by admitting that "The Tale of a Turnip" does not in the least pretend to be a model of style or of composition, and I am quite aware of the number of superfluous repetitions (from any such point of view), of "and" and "so." But then it *is* a "repetition" story, and has the defects of its qualities.

First, a word as to its origin. It is a Russian folk-tale. I was once told by a Russian lady, who happened to be amongst an audience to whom I told the tale, "Every child in Russia knows that story." But I must also add that she continued, "But there are some things in the story when you tell it that are not in it in Russia; for instance, in Russia we never tell anything of the planting of the seed."

I must admit that in some respects the story has been embellished—or I would rather say that, like the turnip, it has *grown*—from the

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rather brief version in which I first met it. My excuse is that it grew by itself, not actually of intention. I have always enjoyed telling it so much, and the children (not to say the grown-ups) have enjoyed it too; and in meeting that friendly little family of turnip growers it has seemed quite natural to begin, as the child would say, "at the very beginning." Other little details have slipped in here and there in the same way. In principle I dare not approve of embellishing folk-tales, but occasionally they insist on growing!

My Russian friend also pointed out to me that the pot "to boil the water to make the turnip soup" would in Russia be placed in the oven to heat, not on the fire. I have written the story down as I have always told it to English children, but in the interests of strict accuracy, perhaps, "in the oven" should be substituted for "on the fire."

Now as to the telling. A repetition story is entirely made or marred by the goodwill of the story-teller. Look upon it as "a silly story," a meaningless, purposeless accumulation of words and phrases, and you will be flat, self-conscious, stumbling, and ashamed of yourself and your story. But if you will only throw yourself into

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it and take the absurd thing quite seriously, as a thing that really happened, *if you will watch it happening*, and will see that each addition and repetition introduces a quite different situation (not just the same one again with a word added), and a fresh crisis to the actors in the story—then the story becomes something alive, something significant, something funny, and you tell it so. It is an affair of growing interest, importance, and laughter.

In the beginning the story is purely narrative. We plant that turnip quite seriously, and watch it grow, and then the fun begins. "It grew, and it grew, and it grew, and it grew, till it grew—as big as this." Show the children with both hands how big. I think it must be at least as big as a big bowl of gold-fish; it is an expansive and magnificent turnip, nothing mean and small about it; so, a good, free gesture.

Then watch the little old Man pulling, and pull yourself. There is no need to stoop and catch hold of the turnip. Too much realism is apt to break the spell of the story by attracting attention to the story-teller. But pull with both hands, and let your voice indicate the little old Man's efforts. "He *pulled*, and he pulled, and he *pulled*, and he pulled," or "He pulled,

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and he pulled, and he pulled, and he *pulled*," rhythmic or cumulative tugs, or any kind you please, only realise them yourself. Try for yourself how the phrase "He couldn't pull up the turnip" should go. Imagine you are telling your own story of vain effort to a friend: "I tried, and I tried, and I tried, and I tried, but I couldn't open that door." Get the intonation and apply it (a valuable piece of advice which I owe, with much else, to Mr. Arthur Burrell).

So the story goes on; each addition gives a fresh situation and a fresh climax. "They couldn't pull up the turnip" may vary with each attempt.

Give your repetition fairly fast, but be careful not to gabble or slur; the words should all be clearly audible. Be interested enough to take the story seriously all the time, and taking it seriously, you will be better able to tell it with laughter. You believe the story; that is why you can laugh.

And then triumphantly: "And *up* came the turnip!" a little pause; then rather fast, "But the little old Man fell over . . ." and so on to slowly and emphatically, "*And on top of them all was the turnip!*"

Finally, the story goes quietly back to narrative

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and a happy ending. "All's well that ends well" is implied by the feast of turnip soup given by that kind little family. It is a characteristic ending of a Russian folk-tale, signifying much hospitality and good-will, and I always find the children are greatly gratified by the narrator's share of the soup! It is a pleasant, comfortable ending, and even if the turnip is only a little story for little people, yet simplicity and kindness are its dominant notes, and those are not little things.



V

*PUSSY, WILL YOU HAVE A
SAUSAGE?*

ONCE upon a time, very long ago, the King of Norway caught a great white bear and sent it as a present to the King of Denmark. The name of the man who took the bear was Nils, and he and the bear were good friends enough, and they ambled along together, up hill and down dale, by road, and rock and forest.

It was a long way to go and they slept where they could, in barns and stables and cowsheds, curled up in a bed of straw or hay, and as the nights grew colder sometimes folk would let them sleep in the kitchen. No one in that part of Norway had ever seen a white bear, and this

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one was so quiet and good-natured that every one liked to look at him.

Well, the old year was getting on to Yuletide (which is what you and I would call Christmas-time), when, just the night before Christmas (Christmas Eve, that is), they came to a wood-cutter's house. Halvor was his name, and he was chopping wood when Nils stopped and asked him if he might have shelter for his bear and himself.

"No," said the wood-cutter, "that you can't, and that's a true word, if I never speak another. There'll be no room in the house for ourselves to-night, for every Yuletide a pack of goblins comes tumbling in; and if we didn't put out all we had for them to eat, and leave the house for them to eat it in, to-morrow there'd be neither food nor furniture left for us! Out we must turn and sleep in the wood-shed, and if you and your bear like to sleep there too—why, you can!"

But it was a cold night; so cold, snow lay on the ground; the frost was crackling in the trees, the very stars seemed to shiver with it, and Nils begged to take his chance in the house, and to sleep in the big bed, built like a cupboard into the wall. The bear, he said, could curl himself up by the stove.

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"Maybe they'll not notice me among the bed-covers, and they'll not trouble the bear!" said he.

So that was what they did. The table was set out all ready for the goblins: soup and porridge and sausages, great loaves of rye bread and fish—everything else that was good. The wood-cutter Halvor and his family went to sleep in the wood-shed; Nils pulled the bed-clothes over his head in the kitchen and the great white bear curled himself up by the stove. And they slept so soundly that they never heard when twelve o'clock came and all the goblins of the Dovrefell came tumbling into the house. So many there were, and so ugly! Some were great and some were small; some had tails and some had none; some had long, long noses, and some had crooked legs.

They were in such a hurry to get to the table that they never saw Nils or noticed the bear. They climbed on the table and under the table and over the table, they ate and drank and tasted everything. Their manners were very bad indeed; no one asked anybody to pass anything, but they grabbed what they wanted and gobbled all they could, and the little goblins ran round and round the table eating all the time!

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Presently, one little goblin noticed the big white bear curled up tight and fast asleep by the fire, and he called to the other little goblins, "Come and tease the woodman's big cat!" (for, you see, he had never seen a white bear in all his life and he thought it would be fine fun). So all the little goblins came crowding round, and he took a sausage on a fork and held it to the bear's



nose and shouted, "Pussy, pussy, will you have a sausage?" The big bear's ears twitched and his nose began to sniff the beautiful smell of that sausage, but he didn't move, and the goblin held the fork nearer, and shrieked louder still, "Pussy, pussy, *will* you have a sausage?"

And then, the big bear's eyes opened wide, and "Ur-rr-rr-rh!" said the big white bear, and up he got and shook himself. "Oh! what a

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terrible big cat!"
squealed the goblin,
and he and all his
friends fell over
backwards with
fright, and
"Ur - rr - rr - rh!"

said the big white
bear, and he hunted the goblins out of the
kitchen!



You should have seen them run! They
tumbled over each other, they trod on each
other's toes and tails, they rolled themselves



into balls
and went
bumping
down the
mountain-
side. There

wasn't a goblin left in the
woodman's house, and Nils and
the great white bear lay down
and went to sleep again, and when
morning came they went on their way.

But first they told the woodman what
had happened, and after that they walked
right out of this story.

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Well, next Yuletide came. Halvor the woodman was chopping wood, for he thought he and his family would need a big fire to keep warm in the wood-shed that night. As he chopped he heard a voice calling, "Halvor! Halvor!" and looking up he saw a goblin peeping at him out of a hollow tree. "Halvor," said the goblin,



"we want to know, have you still got your big cat?"

"My big cat?" said Halvor, and then he remembered the story of the big white bear.

"Oh yes," said Halvor, "I've got my big cat, and she's got seven fine big kittens like herself."

"Seven big kittens! *Seven big kittens!*" said the goblin; "then you can stay in your own house to-night; we are never coming any more!"

And they never did. But Halvor went home and laughed, for, as you know, the big white bear had gone to the King of Denmark, and all that Halvor had was just his own grey pussy-cat and

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her kittens purring by the stove. And that Yuletide they all slept in peace, and had such a supper as never was, that night, and all the Yuletides after.

COMMENTS ON THE STORY

I have adapted the story from an old Scandinavian tale, which goes back to the belief that at the winter solstice, when nights are long and dark and cold, the powers of evil were strongest, and that then, at Yuletide, they held high feast and revel. For the trolls of the story I have substituted the more homely goblins, and have somewhat tamed the great white bear.

The first part of the story is introductory and should be told quietly and comfortably, not slurred over or rendered monotonous. You are all following the journey together.

Then comes Yuletide, cold and dark; something is going to happen. Give the conversation between Nils and Halvor decisively, clearly, and emphatically. Think how you would feel and sound in the same situation. Go a little more slowly, pause between the phrases: "A *cold* night; so cold; the frost was crackling in the trees; the stars seemed to shiver with it."

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Sound cold! Then give details, quietly and clearly as they settle down to sleep. You are setting the stage for action.

Now come the goblins and you quicken up and emphasise, but remember you have a climax to work up to (which, also remember, you must *see* clearly in your mind before you can tell it clearly), and do not expend all your energy at once.

When you come to "Pussy, pussy," remember the goblin really did think the great white bear was a pussy, and that, to the child, *is* funny. Let it *sound* funny. Tell it with a chuckle in your voice, which chuckle should never be far away, all the time you are dealing with the goblins. And then your climax, "Ur-rr-rh!" said the great white bear (a short growl, not too long or alarming), and out go the goblins. "They *tumbled* over each other; they *trod* on one another's toes," etc. This is where you need most energy and emphasis, and again, you must see it yourself; watch them as you tell. Then quiet down. The kitchen grows silent and peaceful, and finally Nils and his bear depart.

A very slight pause, and you take up the story afresh. It is to be a satisfactory ending.

Pussy, Will You Have a Sausage?

The general feeling is the goblins are "scared off." Show it in your voice. The culminating point is, "*and she's got seven kittens like herself.*" Slow and very marked: and the goblin in dismay repeating it.

After that, a complacent, comfortable ending in satisfied contemplation of a Yuletide feast.



VI

JONATHAN JOHN AND HIS WIFE

ONCE upon a time a man named Jonathan John built himself a little house against the side of a steep hill. First he dug away the hillside and made a flat place, just the size of the floor of the house. Then he dug deep down to make a cellar. Then he cut down tall fir trees from the forest that grew near by and built the walls, with windows and a door; he made a floor of wood, he laid long trunks across the walls, and made a roof, and on the roof he put turf, cut from a grassy place on the hillside. The turf took root and grew; and if you had scrambled down the hill

Jonathan John and his Wife

in summer-time you would have seen what looked like a tiny field of long grass, with tall white daisies, golden buttercups, and red sorrel growing amongst it. But it was really the roof of the house, and when you came nearer you could see blue smoke rising from the chimney that Jonathan John had built of stones.

Then Jonathan John dug a well, and built a shed for his cow and a sty for his pig. Some way off, where the ground was good, he made a little cornfield and put a wall of stones round it; he cleared away rocks and built another wall round a place where good grass grew, for food for his cow and his sheep. And one day when everything was finished he looked proudly round and said to himself, "Now I shall ask Gertrude to marry me!" and he did. "Come and be my wife," said Jonathan John, "and live in my nice little house, and we shall be as happy as the day is long."

So Gertrude came to see; she had rosy cheeks and long yellow pigtails, two of them, hanging down her back, and very blue eyes; she looked at the little house and the cow and the pig, and she looked at Jonathan John (who, I forgot to tell you, was tall and strong, with a brown face and eyes as blue as Gertrude's), and she liked

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everything, and Jonathan best of all! So she said, "Yes, I will marry you, and live in your nice little home, and we shall be as happy as the day is long." Then they had a wedding, and it was quite true, they were as happy as the day was long. Gertrude worked hard in the house, and Jonathan John worked hard in the fields, and by and by they had a baby boy, and they were still happier.

But I am sorry to tell you that after a time Jonathan John began to grumble, and he grumbled very much indeed. "Look at all I do and how hard I work in the fields every day," said Jonathan John to Gertrude. "*You* stay at home and have nothing to do. I wish I was you," said he; and every day he grumbled more and more! Gertrude used to cook beautiful dinners for him, and she carried them out to him where he worked in the fields; but it was no use, he grumbled at his dinner, he grumbled at his breakfast, and said *he* could make better porridge, and *he* could churn butter more quickly, and *he* could wash and sew and spin, and never get tired at all. Poor Gertrude was very tired of his grumbling!

At last one morning, when they had finished breakfast, she said, "Jonathan John, what do you say to exchanging work to-day? I will do your

Jonathan John and his Wife

work in the fields and you shall stay at home and do mine, and when evening comes we will see whose work has been easiest."

"*Very* well," said Jonathan John. "*Very* well indeed. We shall soon see who works hardest, and what a comfortable day I shall have!"

"Ah, *very well*," said Gertrude, "*very well* indeed. We will see about that, and now Jonathan John *remember*. First you must let the cow out, give her water, and take her to the field. Then you must churn the butter, and then you must put the porridge on to boil and don't let it burn, and then you must wash the churn and clean the house. By that time it will be twelve o'clock and you must bring me my dinner. Mind the baby, and don't leave the door open or the pig will get in." (Jonathan John's pig was allowed to walk about in the day-time, as pigs do in that country.) "And now," said Gertrude, "good-bye Jonathan John. I am going to the hayfield. Mind you don't forget my dinner!"

So Gertrude took a hayfork and went to the field, and Jonathan John sat still in the sun. "There's plenty of time," he said. Presently he fetched the cream and emptied half of it into the big churn (shaped rather like the tall milk

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cans you see in a milkman's cart), and began to churn. But he was not used to it, and it made him very hot. "I will just go to the cellar and get



a mug of beer," said Jonathan John. So down he went to the cellar, and he had just turned the tap when he heard something come pattering into the kitchen. "I left the door open and that's the pig," said Jonathan John, and he ran up the stairs, and it *was* the pig. The churn was upset and piggy was drinking the cream. "Go away," said Jonathan John, and he threw a wooden stool at piggy; it hit poor piggy on the head, and he went squealing away.

"Oh dear!" said Jonathan John, "what will Gertrude say? and I do believe I have forgotten all about the tap." He ran downstairs to the cellar, and nearly all the beer had run away.

Jonathan John and his Wife

"Oh, dear! *dear!* what *will* Gertrude say?" said Jonathan John, "and I have forgotten all about the cow!"

So he went to let out the cow, but he took the churn, with all the rest of the cream in it, on his back ("To keep it safe," said Jonathan John), and as he leaned over the well to draw water for the cow, the churn tilted and all the cream ran out, over his head, and into the well. "Oh, dear, dear, *dear!*" said Jonathan John, "whatever will Gertrude say? Well," said he, "I haven't time, with all there is to do, to take this cow to the meadow. There's plenty of grass on the roof, she can eat that. That is a very good idea," said Jonathan John. "Gertrude would never have thought of *that.*"



He took the cow up on to the roof. "But I must take care," said he, "that she doesn't run away." So he tied a rope round the cow's horns and dropped the other end down the chimney. Then he went back into

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the house, put the big porridge-pot on to boil, tied the rope round his waist, and sat down by the fire. "The baby is asleep, and I must have a little rest," said Jonathan John; "the cow can't run away while the rope is round my waist. Gertrude would never have thought of *that*." Jonathan John fell fast asleep and



snored; and what do you think happened? The cow went too near the edge of the roof and she fell off. Of course that gave a big tug to the rope and pulled Jonathan John halfway up the chimney!

And he and the cow might still be there, one sticking in the chimney, the other hanging from the roof, if Gertrude had not got tired of waiting for her dinner and come to see what Jonathan John was doing. She saw the poor cow and cut the rope. Down came the cow, and there was a splash and bump in the house, and when Gertrude ran in to look, there was Jonathan John standing on his head in a pot full of burnt porridge!

Jonathan John and his Wife

The baby was still fast asleep; wasn't that a very good thing?

Poor Jonathan John! Gertrude pulled him out and washed his face and kissed him, and helped him clean the kitchen, and after that he never grumbled any more. "I do my work, and you do yours, and that is the best way for both of us," said Jonathan John. And this was what they told all their boys and girls. So they all lived happily ever after.

COMMENTS ON THE STORY

This story is adapted from a Norse folk-tale, to be found under the title of "The Husband who was to Mind the House," in "Popular Tales from the Norse," translated by Sir George Dasent. Probably the original is well known to most readers, and they will remember that the story is brief and deals only with the quarrel and the husband's futile struggles.

The moral is sound, but perhaps the case is put a little one-sidedly. So, partly to put it



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more fairly, I have enlarged upon Jonathan John's hard and successful work in home-building. That, however, is not the only reason. To be really amusing, Jonathan John's troubles should follow one another with a rush, should be told rather fast; and unless the listeners have a perfectly clear idea of the "geography" of the story, they will not be able to grasp the situation as they should.

Therefore the first part of the story must be clearly pictured; every detail has some bearing on the action following. Do not tell it too fast. Children are always interested in home-making, and they will like to watch the little homestead grow.

When the picture is complete, the action begins with Jonathan John's proposal, and the story goes more briskly and very cheerfully, until we come to his grievances, and then, as is becoming, we go a little more slowly and dwell on the details of his complaints.

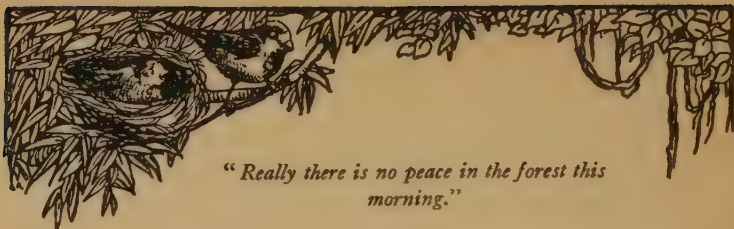
With Gertrude's suggestion the story quickens again, and from henceforth it goes faster, but must by no means go monotonously. Be very careful of voice inflection. Say Gertrude's directions to yourself; they should come very glibly, smoothly, fast, and a little triumphant. *She*

Jonathan John and his Wife

knows and *you* know what will happen to Jonathan John! And now follows confusion. It is impossible to give detailed advice as to this section; it varies from minute to minute, from complacency to dismay, ruefulness, bewilderment, and a misguided triumph.

Put yourself in the poor man's place—see it all. Events must come swiftly, but very clearly; must be so thoroughly grasped that there is no hitch, no slightest pause for remembrance as catastrophe succeeds catastrophe. There is just a momentary slowing down, when Jonathan John thinks he has a respite by the fireside, and then comes the climax, given as clearly and forcibly as possible, with laughter—never far away in all his struggles—in your voice.

Then the kindly, comfortable ending leaves Jonathan John, Gertrude, and the baby in a clean kitchen, with a clear understanding—no bad picture for all of us, big and little alike, to contemplate.



"Really there is no peace in the forest this morning."

VII

FATHER SPARROW'S TUG-OF-WAR

FATHER SPARROW was perched on a twig, talking very fast and very loud to Mother Sparrow, who was sitting on a nest full of eggs. It was early in the day; the sun was shining brightly, the monkeys were chattering, birds were hopping and chirping—it was a pleasant morning, but Father Sparrow was cross.

He had been down to the river to bathe, in a nice shallow place he knew of, and there was the Crocodile, half in and half out of the water, filling up the whole of the bathing-place! And



Father Sparrow's Tug-of-War

when Father Sparrow scolded him, he only opened his mouth wide and laughed (it was a *very* wide mouth), and said, lazily, "I shall stay here just as long as I please."

So Father Sparrow was very cross, and as I have said, he was telling Mother Sparrow all about it, when suddenly, *bump*, somebody very big crashed against the tree, which rocked and swayed so that Father Sparrow nearly fell off his twig; and if Mother Sparrow had not sat very tight the eggs would certainly have rolled out of the nest.

"Really there is no peace in the forest this morning," said Father Sparrow still more crossly (and I think he had some excuse). "Now, who can that be?"

He flew down to see, and there was a big grey back and a little grey tail disappearing amongst the trees. It was Brother Elephant taking a walk in the forest.

"Stop, Brother Elephant!" said Father Sparrow with a loud chirp. "Do you know that you have nearly shaken my wife off her nest?"

"Well," said Brother Elephant, "I don't mind if I have." Which, of course, was very rude of him; he might at least have said he was sorry.

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"You don't mind!" twittered Father Sparrow. "You don't mind! I'll make you mind, Brother Elephant, and if you shake my nest again, *I'll tie you up!*"

Mother Sparrow gave a little chirp of surprise, and Brother Elephant chuckled. "Tie me up then," he said, "you're quite welcome to do it; but you can't keep me tied, Father Sparrow, not even if a thousand sparrows tried!"

"*Wait and see,*" said Father Sparrow. Brother Elephant trumpeted with laughter and went crashing and trampling through the forest, and after a little talk with Mother Sparrow, Father Sparrow flew down to the river. The Crocodile was still there, fast asleep and filling up all the bathing-place. Father Sparrow chirped indignantly, and the Crocodile opened one eye. "I like this place," he said.

"You may like it," said Father Sparrow, "but I can tell you this, if I find you here tomorrow *I'll tie you up!*"

"You may tie me as much as you like," said the Crocodile, shutting his eye again, "but you can't keep me tied, Father Sparrow—not if a thousand sparrows tried."

"*Wait and see,*" chirped Father Sparrow;

Father Sparrow's Tug-of-War

but the Crocodile was fast asleep again. So Father Sparrow flew away.

He was very busy all that morning, talking to all his sparrow friends, and next day they were all up very early and working hard. There were quite a thousand of them, and they had a long, long piece of a creeper that grows in the forest, and is nearly as strong as the strongest rope.

P r e s e n t l y
Brother Elephant
came crashing
through the forest.
Bump! he went
against Father

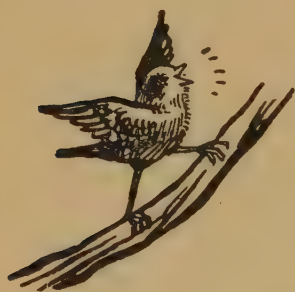


Sparrow's tree. (Mother Sparrow was expecting him, so she was not shaken much.) "Well," said Brother Elephant, "here I am! Are you going to tie me up, Father Sparrow?"

"Yes," chirped Father Sparrow, "I am going to tie you up and hold you tight." And he and all the other sparrows pulled, and pecked,

and hopped and tugged, and fluttered (you can imagine the noise they made), till the rope—it was really a creeper, of course, but we will call it a rope—was tight around Brother Elephant's big body.

"Now, Brother Elephant," said Father Sparrow, "when I say 'Pull,' *pull*."



"So I will," said Brother Elephant, shaking with laughter; and he waited, while Father Sparrow and all the other sparrows flew away with the rope, tugging it through bushes and tall reeds to the riverside. There was the Crocodile, in Father Sparrow's

bathing-place, and when he saw them he laughed.

"Have you and your friends come to tie me up, Father Sparrow?" he said.

"Yes," said Father Sparrow. "I am going to tie you up and hold you tight."

"Tie away," said the Crocodile; and the sparrows pulled, and pecked, and chattered, and tugged, and hopped, till the rope was tight round the Crocodile's long body.

Father Sparrow's Tug-of-War

"Now," said Father Sparrow, "when I say 'Pull,' *pull*."

The Crocodile was too lazy to answer; he only chuckled till the water rippled round him, and the sparrows flew away.

Then Father Sparrow perched himself on the middle of the rope among the bushes, where neither Brother Elephant nor the Crocodile could see him; and of course neither of them could see the other. "*Pull*," cried Father Sparrow in a very loud chirp, and Brother Elephant gave a great tug.

"That will surprise Father Sparrow," he said. But it was really Brother Elephant who was surprised, because from the other end of the line came such a jerk that he was nearly pulled off his feet. Of course he thought it was Father Sparrow, but as you know it was the Crocodile, who never meant to trouble to pull at all; he was far too lazy! *He* thought it was Father Sparrow pulling too, and was even more surprised than Brother Elephant.

"What a strong sparrow he is!" said the Crocodile.

"How hard Father Sparrow can pull," said Brother Elephant, and they both pulled and pulled and pulled and *pulled*.

Sometimes Brother Elephant pulled hardest and the Crocodile was nearly pulled out of the river. Sometimes the Crocodile gave a jerk, and Brother Elephant had to twist his trunk round a tree and hold on. They were really just about equal, and neither could move the other an inch. It was a wonderful tug-of-war. The sun rose high in the sky and began to creep down towards the west; they grew hot and thirsty and tired. The sparrows laughed at them when they puffed and grunted and panted. Each of them thought, "I wish I had not laughed at Father Sparrow." And still they pulled and pulled and pulled—they were so very ashamed and tired.

At last, just as the sun was beginning to slip out of sight, Brother Elephant said in a very small voice: "Please tell Father Sparrow that if he will stop pulling and untie me, I will never be rude to him again."

Just at the same moment the Crocodile said to himself, "All the animals will be coming to drink, and how they will laugh when they see me tied up here!" and he called, "Please, Father Sparrow, stop pulling and untie me, and I will never take your bathing-place again."

"Very well," chirped Father Sparrow very

Father Sparrow's Tug-of-War

loud; "very well, very well" (which was the same as "Hip, hip, hurrah!" would be for you and me), and the sparrows hopped, and pecked, and pulled, and chattered till they untied Brother Elephant, and he went away with his head hanging down, terribly ashamed of being beaten by Father Sparrow. They untied the Crocodile too, and he crawled in among the high reeds that grew by the river and hid himself, dreadfully cross because he had been tied up all day.

Neither of them ever knew they had really been pulling each other, and after this Brother Elephant walked quietly, *so* quietly, in the forest, and the Crocodile let Father Sparrow bathe in peace.

As for Father Sparrow, he and all his friends flew away and told their little wives all about the tug-of-war. Then they put their little heads under their wings and all went fast asleep. It had been a very busy day!

COMMENTS ON THE STORY

The tale of Father Sparrow is adapted from a West African fable, which reads very like the counsel of some wise elder to the chief of a little tribe, set between two overbearing neighbours;

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and this is what it probably was before it became a popular tale.

The keynote of the story is one which, as pointed out in the note on "The Tale of the Bad Little Jackal,"¹ constantly recurs in folk-tales; it tells of the small creature contending by craft and audacity against bulk and strength. Such a story as Father Sparrow's Tug-of-war suggests man's growing realisation that might is not necessarily right. It is a glimpse of an order in which weak things shall be able to hold their own against the strong, and in which the man who uses his wits shall prevail against overbearing brute force.

There is a touch of Brer Rabbit in Father Sparrow, something of his busy, impudent assertiveness, and the story goes briskly and merrily throughout. Like all stories that are worth the telling, it needs to be shared and entered into by the story-teller. It must amuse and interest *us*, as we tell it. We must appreciate the shrewd underlying wit and wisdom, and we must see the pictures it gives very clearly for ourselves. There is the sunshiny, morning pleasantness of the forest, with all its busy chatterings and happenings. Big Brother Elephant comes plunging along, a rough and good-natured bully,

¹ See page 93.

Father Sparrow's Tug-of-War

to be put in his place and made to respect his little neighbour's rights. Then there is the river, with tall green reeds and a still, clear shallow at its edge; the Crocodile's great bulk stretched out and basking. The Crocodile is not malevolent; no one is in this story. He is only sleepy and selfish, not in the least frightening. Watch Father Sparrow, busy, chattering, angry and important, whisking to and fro; and be very clear over the actual tying-up. Make it quite understood that the animals cannot see each other, or the whole point of the story is lost.

When we come to the tug-of-war, the actual words of the story are not necessary (either here, or for the matter of that, elsewhere), if others come more clearly and easily; only do not minimise or cut it short. Moreover, like all bits of vigorous action, gradually rising to a climax, it needs to be really *felt* by the story-teller, who is by turns Brother Elephant and the Crocodile! Show by gesture how they pulled—not too violently—gesture can so easily be overdone. The safest rule, I think, is to try showing yourself; be, for the moment, teller and listener. Practise a little before you use the story, and tell it to yourself aloud. It is wonderful how that helps and lessens self-consciousness.

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In the end the tug-of-war wears itself out to weariness, and we are a very ashamed Brother Elephant and a very sulky Crocodile, asking to surrender. Finally, we watch Father Sparrow and his friends—with loud chirpings and busy flutterings—go bustling home to sleep. It is the equivalent of the satisfactory, “So they all lived happily ever after” of the fairy-tale. The forest and its folk settle down for the night, and the story-teller’s voice takes the comfortable tone that goes with a “well and truly” finished story. Little Father Sparrow and his friends have put their bullying neighbours to confusion, and we like to feel that all the little Mother Sparrows can stay at home in peace.



VIII

A TALE OF THE BAD LITTLE JACKAL

FIRST of all, does everyone know what a jackal is like? Just in case none of you have seen one in the Zoo, I will tell you. He is rather like a fox; he has a sharp nose, pricked-up ears, a bushy tail, and a coat which is sometimes yellowish-grey and sometimes rather brown. He is clever and cunning, mean and greedy, fond of picking up scraps and stealing other people's food instead of hunting for himself. He is always up to tricks, and that is why this is called "A Tale of the Bad Little Jackal."

And now, what is it all about? Well, you shall hear. The story comes from South Africa; it is one of the old stories that have been told for

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very many years. It tells how one year it was terribly hot; no rain fell, the grass and trees died, nearly all the rivers and pools dried up. The animals were terribly thirsty, and went about thin and miserable with their tongues hanging out.

But at last rain came, the pools and rivers filled, the grass and trees were green, and the animals grew fat and strong. Then they said to one another, "Now, if we are wise, we shall make a plan to store up water, before the next dry time comes, so that we may have plenty to drink." So they all met together. Lion was there of course, Ostrich, Ant-eater, Baboon, Rabbit, Antelope, little Tortoise, and many others, and Jackal came too. After talking for a long while they decided to find a place where there was a spring, and then to dig a large, deep hole for the water to trickle into, so that there would be a great pool to drink from, no matter how long it was before the rain fell again.

"Will you all agree to dig?" said Lion in his deep voice.

"Oh yes, Uncle," they all said. (They called him "Uncle" out of respect, which you really do, in South Africa. And "Oh yes, *indeed*, Uncle," said Jackal.

A Tale of the Bad Little Jackal

So they all began to dig. Lion scratched with his forepaws and kicked with his hind legs, and made the sand fly. Ostrich scratched. Ant-eater dug busily with his paws and claws; even little sister Tortoise dug with her little feet. Everybody did their best—everybody but Jackal. What do you suppose *he* did? He sat and laughed!

“*Work?*” said Jackal. “Not I,” said Jackal. “*You* work and *I’ll* drink, when you’ve finished,” said he—and they knew he would. He was always stealing their food, and now he meant to steal their water. They were very angry, but no one wasted time trying to answer him. They dug steadily on while Jackal laughed and said rude things, and by and by the deep pool was finished, and the clear cool water flowed into it and filled it to the brim.

“*Now,*” said Lion, “we will build a high wall round it and leave a narrow entrance. Then we will set a guard to watch; Jackal would not help to dig the pool and he shall not drink the water.” And that was quite fair, I am sure you will all agree.

So the wall was built. “*Now,*” said Lion, “who will guard the opening?”

“I will, Uncle! I will!” said Hare, and

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as he is small and quick, with big eyes that see well, all the animals thought it would be a good plan.

They went away to their homes and Hare sat by the opening and watched with his big eyes, thinking what a fine fellow he was and how he would chase Jackal with his long legs if he even came *near* the well. Presently he saw Jackal,



who came strolling quietly past, nibbling something. As Jackal came near Hare saw it was a piece of honeycomb, but Jackal did not seem to see

Hare at all; he strolled along, nibbling and singing a little song. Presently he stopped and leaned against the wall, quite close to Hare, saying to himself, "How *nice* it is! How *sweet* it is. I am not thirsty; no, indeed, how could I be with this sweet, clear honey to drink?"

Hare watched him nibble and wondered if it really was so very good. (Hare is very inquisitive.) At last he said, "Is it so very good, Jackal?"

"Oh, are you there?" said Jackal, "I didn't

A Tale of the Bad Little Jackal

see you. Yes, it is *very* good. As for all that water you are guarding so carefully, who cares about *that*, if they can get honey!"

"Could I taste it?" said Hare.

"Well," said Jackal, "I would let you taste it, but you know you've been put there by those angry animals to guard the water. How am I to know," said Jackal chuckling to himself, "that you won't hurt me if I come near you?"

"I won't hurt you," said Hare.

"Well," said Jackal, "let me tie your paws, and then I'll put the honey into your mouth."

"Oh yes, indeed," said silly Hare, thinking to himself, "Jackal doesn't really want any water at all."

So Jackal tied Hare's paws, so that he couldn't move—and then—well, then—he just jumped over him, and splash he went into the beautiful cool, clear pool. He swam round and round, he drank all he could, and then he most spitefully stirred up the mud and ran away laughing, leaving a dirty pool behind him—and he didn't even give Hare one taste of honey!

When the animals came to drink that evening there was their beautiful water all muddy, and Hare tied up like a bundle. They were extremely cross; so cross that they quarrelled about

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who should guard the pool next, and they were very rude to each other. But when everyone had finished making a noise, little Sister Tortoise (who comes of a very quiet family) said in her little voice, "I can guard the water." And as they were all rather ashamed of themselves for having been angry and foolish, they agreed to let her do it.

So little Sister Tortoise sat herself in the opening. She tucked her head into her shell and drew in her feet and her tail till no one could tell which end of her was which. Then she waited.

Presently she heard Jackal coming, singing his little song, nibbling his sweet honeycomb. He looked all round with his sharp eyes. There was only quiet little Sister Tortoise to be seen, and she neither moved nor spoke.

"Will you have some sweet honey, Sister Tortoise?" said Jackal; but Sister Tortoise stayed inside her shell and never spoke. "Do have some sweet honey," said Jackal; but Sister Tortoise was quite quiet, and Jackal really could not tell if he was talking to her head or tail, which was most awkward!

"Silly creature," said Jackal, "she's asleep. No need to trouble about her. I'll go and enjoy

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this precious water," and he was just stepping calmly over Sister Tortoise when out came her little head and she caught Jackal by the hind leg with her sharp little teeth. Then you should have heard Jackal squeal! You should have seen him kick! But little Sister Tortoise is strong and tough as leather; he begged her to let go; he offered her all his honey, juicy green grass and leaves to eat; he cried and he sobbed, and still she held on. Hour after hour went by, and Jackal had time to think how angry the animals would be, and what dreadful things they would do to him when they came in the evening to drink and found him there. He thought he was too clever for any of them, and he had been caught by quiet little Sister Tortoise!



But when the animals did come, Jackal looked so funny that all they could do was to sit and laugh. Lion roared, so did Ostrich; the others chuckled and squealed and shrieked; and in the middle of it all Jackal (who minds being laughed

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at most dreadfully) gave one last kick, and I think perhaps Sister Tortoise was sorry for him, for she let go and laughed too. As for Jackal, he ran, and ran, and ran, and ran—and ran and ran—far away, out of that place, and never came



back to spoil that nice pool any more. Wasn't he a foolish fellow? For after all, you see, he might have had all the water he wanted if he had only done his share of the work. And after that all the animals used to come every evening to bathe and drink at their beautiful pool, and they were all very grateful to little Sister Tortoise.

A Tale of the Bad Little Jackal

COMMENTS ON THE STORY

This is adapted from one of a number of South African folk-tales, in all of which the jackal is the villain (I cannot say hero), very much as Brer Rabbit is the central figure of the well-known stories of "Uncle Remus." In some ways the tales of their adventures are alike, since in each case they deal with the wiles by which cunning seeks to defeat strength. But in the case of Brer Rabbit—that debonair, engaging, and undaunted rascal—his wits are pitted against the superior power of his fellow-rascals, and we can hardly keep from sympathy, and cannot refrain from laughter as we watch his tricks and audacities. The Jackal, on the contrary, is an outlaw; his schemes are directed against law and order, against the community, and his efforts to enriching himself at the expense of law-abiding citizens.

Therefore, be it noted, this story is not just a "funny story" of animals, nor does it merely point the oft-repeated moral of the braggart hare and the quiet tortoise. It has a wider application. They, who of old made and told the story, were telling experience, history in the making. They were describing the building up

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of a community, the first beginnings of provision, fore-thought, mutual labour, and responsibility. The story is a lesson in citizenship, and this should be remembered in telling. Otherwise the children may accept it as one more strange vagary of "Tommy Lion," "Cissie Tortoise," "Allie Ostrich," and so forth, plenty of which strange beasts may be found, if desired, in any "comic supplement" for children.

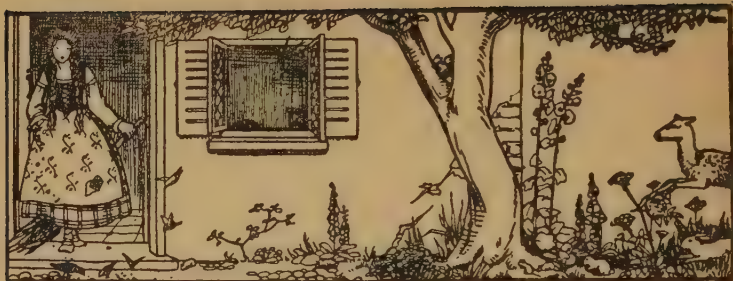
But this is to be taken seriously. These busy creatures are planning, working, with purpose and good-will, as we work ourselves—as Scouts, Guides, Clubs, Councils, and Parliaments—wherever the many work together for the good of each and all. It is the concerted effort, the willing service that are to stand forth clearly; and against this background the sneering, lazy jackal shows as a selfish cur. So on these lines the story unfolds; in a clear, businesslike way we tell of the need, the project, and its completion.

Then the community is forced to a further step. Law and order must guard against the lawless. Defence is organised. The spirit of citizenship is tested, and in the case of the hare is found wanting. Not only the lawless, but the selfish and inconsiderate members are a danger to the whole body. This part is really funny.

A Tale of the Bad Little Jackal

Jackal has something of Brer Rabbit's impudence and ingenuity. On the whole one is inclined to feel he won his water in open fight—knave against fool. But (remember the story must have been based on principle, won from experience) the rogue is not to get off scot-free. He is to be repaid in kind. So, still with a twinkle, the tale goes on to tell of quiet Sister Tortoise.

The last part of the story must go vigorously; put energy into the telling and laughter also. Let the children realise Jackal's well-earned discomfiture; let them see him as the animals saw him—very ridiculous, very funny, very much "the biter bit." After this the story and the community settle down to a comfortable ending.



IX

THE SPINDLE, THE SHUTTLE AND THE NEEDLE

ONCE upon a time, in a little village on the edge of a great forest, there lived a girl whose name was Rose-Marie. It is a very pretty name, I think, and Rose-Marie was just as pretty and as pleasant as her name. Her father and mother had died while she was only a little child, and then she lived with her old godmother, who loved her dearly. The old woman had earned her living by spinning, weaving, and sewing, and she taught Rose-Marie to do the same. When she died she had no money to give her god-daughter, but she left her the little house, the spindle, the shuttle, and the needle, with one piece of advice, "Keep all bright and busy, my

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child, speak the truth, and love your neighbours, and all will be well."

Rose-Marie promised; and so—though she lived all alone in her little house, in the shade of a great lime tree, outside the village—she was always bright and busy, helping her neighbours, sweeping and cleaning her house, spinning, weaving, or sewing; and as she worked she sang the songs her godmother had taught her. The sun shone in at her window, the birds chirped among the branches of the tall lime tree, rabbits and hares and little wood-mice frisked and played at the edge of the forest. Rose-Marie loved them all, and was very happy all day long. And though some people would say she was certainly poor, the wonderful thing was that there was always enough for her and something over to give away; which is really the nicest way of being rich!

Now, there came a time when the king's son was old enough to marry. In those days kings' sons used to travel through the world looking for someone who would be just the wife they wanted; so this prince set out on his journey like all the rest. "I will only marry the maid who is both the richest and the poorest," he said; and though *he* knew very well what he meant, nobody

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else could understand it at all. But in every town and village all the girls put on their very finest clothes, to look *rich*; and began to tell everyone how well they could keep house on a very little money, to sound *poor*. And certainly they all looked pretty, but none of them pleased the prince.



Presently he came to the village where Rose-Marie lived. Now in that village was a very rich girl—very rich she was and very pretty—and when she heard the prince was

coming she said to herself, "He is quite certain to choose me!" So she put on all her very best clothes—a beautiful flounced skirt of rose-red silk, a green satin kirtle, a gold chain round her pretty white neck, and gold pins in her shining golden hair. Then she sat herself down on the bench beside her father's door to wait till the prince came by; and when the prince came riding down the street she rose up and made him the most beautiful curtsy

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that ever was seen. Down and down and *down* she went, with her rose-coloured silken skirt all in fluffs and frills and flounces round her, till she looked like a great red rose. And the prince smiled and leaned from his saddle and threw her a kiss—she was so very pretty—and swept off his cap with the long white feather and made her a low bow for politeness' sake after her lovely curtsy. Then he rode on down the street!

The rich man's daughter came slowly up out of her curtsy (because she was so very much surprised), and sat down on the bench by the door of her father's house and said, "Well, I never *did*." It was not good grammar, I know, but she really could not help it. You see, she had been so sure the prince would stop and say, "Will you marry me?"

But the prince rode on down the street and called to the people of the village: "I have seen the richest maid of your village; now show me the poorest!" And they said, "She lives in the little house under the great lime tree, and her name is Rose-Marie." Then a little girl said, "She has a grey hen and she gave me one of its eggs," and a little boy said, "She helped me find my ball when I lost it," and a woman said, "She

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helped me with my spinning when I hurt my hand," and the prince smiled and said, "She has enough and to spare!"

Now Rose-Marie was spinning and singing to herself as she spun. She was sitting by her window because she hoped to see the prince ride by; but after all when she heard the sound of his horse's hoofs she stopped singing because she thought it was not respectful to a prince, and she was far too shy to look up.

The prince rode slowly by; he looked at Rose-Marie and hoped she would look at him, but Rose-Marie only spun faster and faster, and never once looked out of the window. So the prince rode on down the road, and Rose-Marie began her song again. It was an old song of her godmother's, and it went, "*Spindle, spindle, haste, I pray; guide my true love's steps this way.*" Lo and behold! as she sang, the spindle hopped from the wheel and on to the window ledge. Next moment it was on the ground, and with one long hop after another, Rose-Marie saw it go down the road with the linen thread trailing after it, shining like gold in the sunshine!

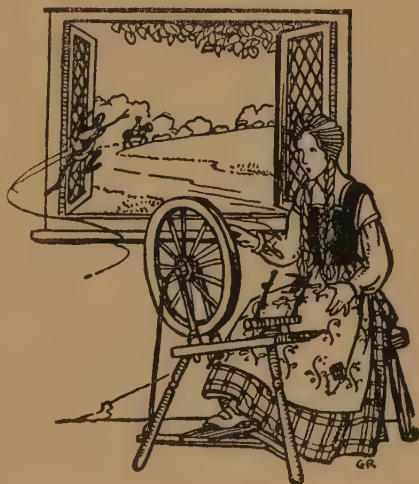
It was certainly very strange, and there was no more spinning to be done without a spindle;

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so Rose-Marie took the shuttle and began to weave. As she wove, she sang another of her godmother's songs. "*Shuttle, shuttle, swift and smooth, weave a carpet for my love.*" But as soon as she had sung that far, the shuttle sprang from

her hand and began to weave by itself, working so busily that in almost no time at all it was making a most wonderful carpet. The border was of roses and lilies, the centre was as golden as sunlight, and woven into the gold was a great green

tree. On the tree were gay-coloured birds, and under it were tall stags, little hares and rabbits and squirrels with bushy tails. It was a most beautiful carpet. But as the shuttle was so busy all by itself, there was nothing for Rose-Marie to do but to take the needle and sew a seam; and as she sewed she sang another song her god-



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mother had taught her. *"Needle, needle, sharp and fine, help to deck this house of mine."*

She had only sewn a very little of her seam when she heard a rustling among the leaves of the great lime tree (you remember it grew by her house), and something floated softly in at her window.



Rose-Marie looked up, and the needle twitched itself out of her hand; the next moment it was sewing busily at a heap of soft green silk—just the colour of lime leaves—that lay upon

the floor. So fast it worked! It was like a little streak of sunshine flashing, and it must have been threaded with sunlight, I think, for it made gold stitches as it went. Then two green curtains fluttered up, as if they were wings, and hung themselves at the window; and when Rose-Marie had stopped looking at them in great surprise (wouldn't you have been sur-

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prised?) she was just in time to see a big, soft, green cushion float, almost as lightly as a soap-bubble, into the big, wooden chair in which her godmother used to sit.

Then the beautiful carpet spread itself upon the floor, and Rose-Marie in her old, everyday clothes, stood wondering at it all.



She was wondering so much (and wouldn't you?) that she never heard the sound of hoofs, and she was most surprised of all when the prince stood in the doorway with her shuttle in his hand! "Rose-Marie, Rose-Marie," he said,

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"I have brought you back your shuttle. Will you marry me?"

And Rose-Marie looked at him, and she liked him, and she curtsied right down to the beautiful carpet, and said, "Yes, please—with all my heart!"

So they were married and lived happily ever after; and Rose-Marie taught all her little girls to spin and weave and sew with her godmother's spindle and shuttle and needle. Many and many a time, too, she told her boys and girls the story of the wonderful things they did; and the story always ended with her godmother's advice: "Keep bright and busy, speak the truth, and love your neighbours, and all will go well." And so, I expect, they *all* lived happily ever after!

COMMENTS ON THE STORY

The story is really a considerably amplified version of one of Grimm's fairy-tales—not a very well-known one. I am sorry that it begins with no less than three deaths! But the fairy-tale heroine is usually lovely and lonely, and children accept this convention without wasting time on regrets. If, however, it is felt that this is too gloomy a start, it is easy to begin by saying

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that "Rose-Marie lived all alone in a little house left her by her godmother . . ." and so forth, giving the training, bequests, and advice bestowed by that excellent woman.

I have tried not to make Rose-Marie oppressively virtuous, but just to show that "her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace"; and so the story is chiefly a matter of pleasant pictures and surprising and delightful happenings. If we can see and enjoy and convey these, the moral may safely be left to take care of itself.

Some stories are like a quiet turning of the leaves of a great book of bright pictures. This, I think, is one such, and if we try to realise each picture before telling, the story should not prove hard to memorise. Stand under the lime tree, in its cool, green shadow, hear the birds stirring and chirping, the leaves rustling, listen to and watch Rose-Marie as she sings and works. See the sunny village street with the folk peeping from their windows; the prince riding all alone as princes do in fairy-tales, and the wealthy maiden waiting for him, all rose and gold and green.

The story is not intensely dramatic, and there is much description and contemplation in it that needs care in telling, lest the voice should become

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monotonous. Be very careful of inflection at certain points. The even thread of the story is first broken at, "Then he rode on down the street." That is a most surprising happening—blankly so—to the wealthy maiden, and the inflection is rather like that of "I looked straight at you and you never saw me!" Most of us know just how we say that to a friend who has passed us, unrecognising; and there is always a pause after it to give the statement due weight. So it should be here. Let the surprise "sink in," and then make clear the vain bewilderment of the rejected one.

The little dialogue between the prince and the villagers ends on a note of quiet satisfaction; there is a very slight pause and the story starts on a further stage. Once more we are watching pictures go quietly by, till again we pause in surprise, to see the spindle go hopping down the road! Here each event is marked by a momentary halt of wonder and astonishment—till the climax comes. Then—*you* are not surprised, but Rose-Marie is, and you smile as you tell it, at her bewilderment and joy; and take pleasure in the right and fitting close. Comfortably and happily the tale finishes, as a fairy-tale should end: "They all lived happily ever after."



X

THE LACE-MAKER OF BRUGES

HAVE you ever been out on a quiet autumn morning and seen the webs that the spiders make, hanging on bramble bushes with red and crimson leaves, or stretched from point to point of the dark green furze bushes, or lying like fairy nets on the grass? They are there in the summer it is true, but we hardly see them because they are so small and fine; but in autumn, when the nights are still and cold every web is hung with tiny, shining, sparkling dewdrops. Then we say, "How lovely the gossamer is this morning!" (Gossamer comes from an old English word that means something very light and soft, so it is a good name for spiders' webs.)

Sometimes—when we go picking blackberries

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or nuts, or gathering a bunch of the very last blue scabious and yellow ragwort, and a bit of honeysuckle, amongst the golden-brown bracken, on the edge of the wood—something blows softly against our faces, and we see long threads of gossamer, shining in the sunlight as they float along. Some days the air seems full of them, as if the spiders had spun a great deal more thread than they needed, and were letting it drift away like thistledown.

Now here is a story about gossamer. Some of it is true; some of it is *legend*—that is to say, the meaning is true, but perhaps not quite all of it really happened.

It is a very old story—quite six hundred years old, I think, perhaps more—and it comes from a very old town across the sea, called Bruges, in Belgium. Perhaps you have seen pictures of Bruges, and you know what a beautiful old town it is, full of old houses with high steep roofs, and a great market-place, with a splendid tall belfry tower and bells that ring more sweetly than any other bells in the world.

Bruges is not by the sea; it lies amongst green fields, but ships came to it, in old days, for all that. They came sailing along the wide, deep canals that run from the sea, between the green

The Lace-Maker of Bruges

fields, and then—like roads between the houses—into Bruges.

Now, long ago when the story begins, there was a sailor who lived in Bruges. His wife was named Barbara, and they had one little daughter, whom they named Serena (and that means "Peaceful," because

they were so happy).

The sailor went long voyages on one or other of the great ships that came in and out of Bruges, and sometimes he would be away a long time. But sooner or later the ship came sailing back to Bruges, with spices and almonds and raisins and dates, gold



and silver embroideries and carpets from the East. Mother Barbara and Serena lived high up in one of the tall old houses, looking out on the canal where the ships sailed; and they watched and waited and wondered when the ship with *their* sailor would come, and what he would bring for them. But one year, when

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Serena was about twelve years old, very sad news came with the ship. The captain told them sorrowfully that Serena's father had been drowned in a terrible storm. That was a very hard year for them. It was autumn when the ship came in, the winter was long and cold, and there was very little money to buy food or clothes; and now that there was no sailor father to bring back more, they had to be very careful. Mother Barbara worked hard, making lace, and Serena was quite old enough to help her. So she worked too; but they were very poor indeed.

Serena used to wish she could help her mother more. She could earn so *very* little, she thought; and she was a very hungry little girl, just as all little girls ought to be who are growing taller every day, and who mean to be big girls soon! "If only there were something I could do, so that mother need not work so hard," she said to herself. And when the great bells rang out at noon from the Church of St. Basil and everyone stopped in their work for a moment to listen and to say a prayer (which is a beautiful custom they have in the land where Serena lived), Serena would pray, "O holy Virgin, O Mother of Jesus, help me to help my mother."

One sunny day, in autumn, Serena and her

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mother were walking in the green fields outside the city. It was a holiday, and even busy Mother Barbara had time to rest a little; by and by they sat down on the green grass under a tree. The sky was clear blue, with a few little silvery-white clouds; a warm wind just whispered in the grass, and sometimes a yellow leaf floated softly down. It was so still and warm, so quiet in the sunshine, that Serena took off her black cloak and laid it beside her. Mother Barbara leaned her head against the tree and closed her eyes. "Mother looks very tired to-day," Serena thought. "If only I could help to earn more money, she could rest more, and we could often walk in the green fields and be happy together as we did when my father was alive." And then Serena closed her eyes and prayed, as she prayed every day: "O Mother of Jesus, help me to help my mother."

Then she felt something brush softly against her face. She opened her eyes to look and saw a long thread of gossamer floating down, and then another and another. The air seemed full of them, all gleaming in the sunlight, and



Serena saw that they were all drifting down on to her black cloak. Every silvery thread seemed to know just where and how to go; each one had its own way and its own place; and when the last thread had floated down they were all woven most wonderfully together into a pattern that



looked as if it had been made of white flowers and star-shine and moon-shine and hoar-frost!

Serena was still looking at it when Mother Barbara opened her eyes and said, "Come, little daughter, we must be going home. The sun is sinking, and see, the dew is beginning to lie on the gossamer webs; soon it will be cold."

"But see, oh see, mother; see what I have!" said Serena, and she showed her the wonderful

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pattern on her black cloak. "May I carry it home, because it is so pretty?"

"If you can, child," said Mother Barbara, smiling and surprised. "Indeed it is like the most beautiful lace. If only I could make such, we need never be poor again!"

The wonderful thing was that Serena did carry it home. She slipped her hands under the cloak, and took it up, and every thread stayed fast in its place. She carried it safely back, and then she laid it before the little statue of the Child Jesus and His Mother that stood in the corner of the room. "It is so beautiful," she said, "that I must put it there. Surely Our Lady sent it, and it belongs to her." So there the gossamer lace was laid.

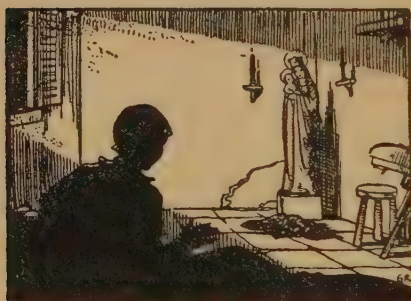
But this is not—as perhaps you think—the end of the story. This is one of the stories which never end; it is still going on to-day.

For that night, Serena could not sleep. It seemed to her that there was something for her to do; she could not think what, but she lay awake and wondered. Presently the moonlight came peeping in at the windows, and a long, shining ray touched the gossamer lace where it lay on the black cloak before the little statue. It seemed to Serena that the Child Jesus and His

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Mother were looking and smiling at the beautiful pattern, and suddenly she thought, "Mother said it looked like beautiful lace. Could I make a pattern like that? I wonder if it is meant for me?" and she watched the pattern in the moonlight till she fell fast asleep.

So when morning came Serena took her lace



pillow and her finest thread, and tried; and her fingers seemed to move, so quickly and surely, and the gossamer pattern was plain and easy to follow, although it was so

wonderful. Soon she had made some lace that was finer and more beautiful than any that had ever been made before. Everyone who saw it wished to buy, and a great lady paid many pieces of gold and wore the lace upon her wedding-gown.

After that Serena and her mother were poor no longer. They made their lace by the gossamer pattern and taught others to make it too, and still in the country where Serena lived some

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of the most beautiful lace in the world is made. That is why I said the story is not ended yet.

And in that country gossamer is sometimes called by a name that means "Our Lady's threads." Perhaps it is to remind us that all beautiful things come from Love, and that Love teaches us how to use them.

COMMENTS ON THE STORY

I found the bare outline of the story in a book of old Flemish legends. I have adapted it a little and have tried to give it a setting that will bring pleasant pictures to the child's mind, but the central incident of the story—the woven gossamer threads—is no invention; it occurs more than once in folk-lore. There is a story current in the Shetland Isles of a poor cripple-girl who watches a spider weaving, and who is thus inspired with a wonderful design for her knitting, and there is, of course, the old Greek legend of Arachne.

The introduction to the story is meant for town children who have never seen gossamer. It seemed necessary to try to give them some idea of its fairy-like loveliness, and of its rather wayward and unexpected encounters and driftings.

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Perhaps even country children will enjoy the story the more for being reminded of it. That is a matter for the story-teller to decide. It is a good rule to avoid overloading with description, and whenever possible, to plunge straight into the story, but occasionally a little preliminary description or explanation is necessary; then, this prelude should be as brief and clear as possible. I am not quite sure that I have kept to my own sage counsel in respect of brevity, because I enjoyed telling about gossamer and "seeing pictures" of remembered autumn mornings—but it can be left out if not needed.

I have tried to tell the story as simply as possible. If anyone prefers to tell it as a fairy-tale it would not be difficult to do so, but I think the story would lose greatly by the alteration. It is a story of the "changes and chances of this mortal life," and of the simple trust which believes that all these can be met and every need supplied.

So let us take it, as the saying goes, "seriously," and then, in telling, try to realise (some of us will remember, which is better) the charm and beauty of the old town in the wide, green country; the golden stillness of the October day; and the gleaming, floating skeins of

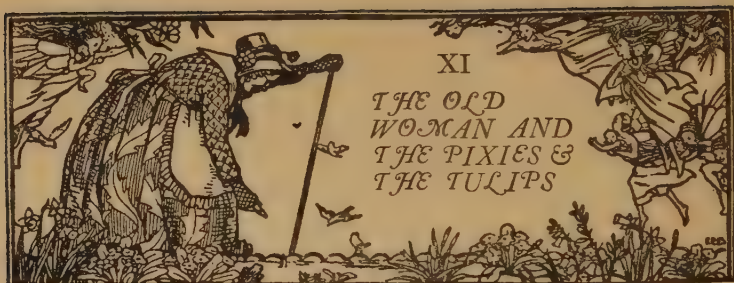
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gossamer in the sunlight. It is like a fairy-tale; but it goes deeper and is truer than any such.

Watch the precious web as it is laid before the image of the Mother and Child, and then see the little dark room in the sleeping town, lit by the gleam of moonlight, shining on the white figure and the silvery tracery.

The story pauses just a moment as Serena falls asleep, and then we come briskly back to everyday life. But do not let this coming back be a hurried anticlimax to you. It is the practical working out of the heaven-sent exemplar (the origin of our word "sampler").

It seems to me that the story is telling us what has been told again and again in many ways. We cannot be content only to contemplate beauty and ideals; if we do that they are only a gossamer web to us, only a shadow of the real. We must work them out in daily life; and so, like Serena, bring comfort, happiness, well-being and true loveliness to the world.



"There's one."

ONCE upon a time there was an Old Woman who lived in a little white house with two little windows, one each side of the door, and two more little windows looking out of the roof. There was a garden in front of the little house and it was always full of flowers. The Old Woman liked to have flowers all the year round and she loved every one of them. Very early indeed, just after Christmas, there were Snowdrops and yellow Aconites and Crocuses, and then Primroses and Violets and Polyanthuses and Periwinkles, and presently Daffydownillies and Wallflowers and Pansies and Forget-me-nots and by and by pink-and-white Daisies and Roses and Pinks and Campanulas and Stocks and Canterbury Bells and Sweet Williams, and after them

The Old Woman and the Pixies and Tulips

Asters and Dahlias and Michaelmas Daisies, until it was Christmas again.

But the flowers that the Old Woman loved best of all were the Tulips. They grew on each side of the little path that led up to her door, and quite early in April the Old Woman would begin to look for them. She used to walk up the path and down the path looking at the garden bed, till one day she would see a little green shoot, and she would nod her head and say, "*There's one.*" Soon there would be another, and another and another and another, all up and down, both sides of the path. And the Old Woman would walk up the path and down the path and watch them grow. The sun shone and the rain rained and the wind blew soft, and the little green shoots grew taller and taller and opened into green leaves with a flower-bud between them. By and by the buds began to turn colour. Some were pink and some were white, some were yellow and some were red, and some were red *and* yellow. They grew tall and strong, and when they were all in bloom the Old Woman used to walk up the path and down the path between the rows of Tulips, and she would say, "All a-growing and a-blowing. So they *be*. All a-growing and a-blowing."

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She thought they were very pretty indeed, and so they were!

Well—one year it was May-time and the Tulips were all in bloom. They were prettier than ever that year, tall and strong and fine. One night in May there was a full moon, a large, round, beautiful moon, that made it almost as bright as day. It was really the Old Woman's bed-time, but just as she was going up to bed she thought of the Tulips and how pretty they would look in the moonlight; and she said to herself, "I must just take one peep at them before I go to bed." So she opened the door and peeped out. And the Tulips *did* look pretty in the moonlight. It was as light as day—there was a little wind blowing and the Tulips were swaying to and fro, to and fro. "*All* a-growing and a-blowing. *All* a-growing and a-blowing, so they be!" said the Old Woman. But it really was her bed-time, so she was just going to shut the door and go to bed, when all of a sudden she put her hand to her ear and listened. "Oh!" said the Old Woman, "I can hear music—very sweet music! What can it be?" (You see, there was no other house near and it was too late for anyone to be going by singing or whistling.) "What can it be?" said the Old Woman again.

The Old Woman and the Pixies and Tulips

And instead of going to bed, she began to walk down the path between the rows of tulips, because the music was so sweet she felt she must get nearer. When she came to her little gate and leaned over it, she could still see nobody, but the music sounded very near and clear and sweet. And all of a sudden the Old Woman said, "I know—I know—I know! 'Tis they Pixies!" (Now, "Pixies" is what they call Fairies in Devonshire, where the Old Woman lived.) For she remembered that just over the hedge, beyond her gate there lay a Pixy-ring, and she knew that when the moon shines bright in May-time the Pixies come up from their homes underground to dance on the Pixy-rings. It was their music she had heard—no wonder it sounded sweet. But the Old Woman knew too that Pixies do not like to be watched when they are dancing, so she didn't look over the hedge. She said, "Bless their little hearts!—bless their little hearts!" and she turned round to walk up the path between the rows of Tulips. It really *was* time for her to go to bed!

But the Tulips did look so pretty in the moonlight. They were so pretty that the Old Woman felt she wanted to look a little closer; so she stooped down quite close to a Tulip—and then

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she gave a little jump and said, "Why! bless me!" and she peeped into the next Tulip and she said, "Bless me" again, and she peeped into the next Tulip and said, "Bless *me!*" and she

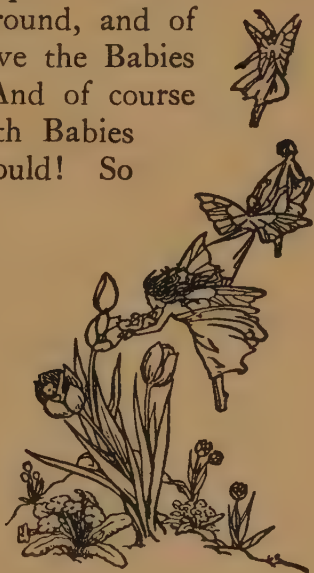


peeped into the next Tulip and she said, "Bless me!" and the next and the next and the next and the next. She went up the row and down the row. She peeped into every Tulip, and every time she said, "Bless me!" She was *most* surprised, and so would you have been, for in every Tulip

The Old Woman and the Pixies and Tulips

there was a Pixy *Baby*, and it was fast asleep! Then the Old Woman guessed what had happened. The Pixies had come up to dance, from their homes underground, and of course they could not leave the Babies behind—nobody could. And of course they could not dance with Babies in their arms—nobody could! So they had thought of the Tulips in the Old Woman's garden, and every Pixy Mother had come hurrying away and tucked her Baby up in a Tulip-cradle. The Tulips made beautiful cradles, so deep and safe; the wind was rocking them and all the Pixy Babies had fallen fast asleep.

Well, the Old Woman was pleased—and wouldn't *you* have been pleased to find Pixy Babies tucked up in the Tulips in your garden? She *was* pleased. She said, "Bless their little hearts!" a great many times, and then she remembered it really *was* her bed-time and she



went to bed! But next night and the night after and the night after that and every night when it was moonlight in May-time the Old Woman always came and peeped; and she always found the Pixy Babies asleep in the Tulip-cradles.

Now, for a long time and a very long time and a very long time indeed, the Old Woman lived in the little white house. But after a long time and a very long time and a very long time indeed the Old Woman didn't live there any longer. Another Person came to live there, and do you know, she didn't like flowers! She said, "They wasted a deal of good ground that might be used for vegetables." So she *pulled them up*. She pulled up the Snowdrops and Aconites and Crocuses—the Primroses and Polyanthuses and Periwinkles—the Daffydowndillies, the Wall-flowers and Pansies and Forget-me-nots—the pink-and-white Daisies and Roses and Pinks—the Campanulas and Stocks and Sweet Williams and Canterbury Bells and the Dahlias and Asters and Michaelmas Daisies—and she pulled up the Tulips too! She threw them all out on to the rubbish heap and she planted the garden with vegetables in nice neat rows—Carrots and Onions and Turnips and Parsnips and Cabbages and

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Potatoes and Peas. And where the Tulips used to grow, on both sides of the little path, she planted a row of Parsley! Now, in those days Parsley was a very nice neat little plant, but it had no crinkles in its leaves; they were quite smooth and flat.

Well, May-time came, and the full Moon came, and the Pixies came from their homes underground to

dance on the Pixy-ring. They brought their Babies with them, and every Pixy Mother said to every Pixy Father, "My dear, we must tuck the Baby up first!"



So off they came to

the garden to find the Tulip cradles. And oh dear! oh dear! oh dear!—there weren't any Tulip-cradles!

I really do not know where the Pixy Babies slept that night, but I can tell you what the Pixy Mothers did. They were *very angry indeed*. Every Pixy Mother popped her Baby down on the garden path and they flew at the Parsley and they *pinched* the Parsley. They would have

liked to pinch the Person who had planted it where the Tulips ought to be, but as they could not get at her they pinched the Parsley! They pinched it so hard that it has never come unpinched, and if you look at it you will see that it is all crinkly along the edges to this very day!

Then the Pixies went to look for the Tulips and they found the poor things trying to grow on the dust-heap—but there were no Tulip-cradles that year. So the Pixies took the Tulips, and all the other poor flowers as well, and they planted them in a safe place. And next year when May-time came and the full moon came there were the Tulip-cradles all a-growing and a-blowing and the Pixies put their Babies to sleep in them.

And they do say—you can try for yourself and see that this is true—that some Tulips smell a great deal sweeter than others. Now, I think that these are the Tulips that grew from the Tulips that grew in the Old Woman's garden, where the Pixies put their Babies to sleep!

COMMENTS ON THE STORY

The source of this story is a fragment of West-country folk-lore. I have re-told it at length,

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and it has grown (I might say "flowered") a good deal, but I have followed the lines of the original except as to the Pixies' revenge. "They bewitched the garden, so that nothing would grow there henceforth." That seemed to me a sad fate for that happy little plot, and it is such a friendly story that I did not want to sadden it with cursings and bewitchments and witherings of green-growing things. So I borrowed a little from some Oriental fairies that I knew of and let the Pixies vent their feelings on the Parsley. Also I think I had better explain that the "safe place" where the Tulips were planted was, in the original, on the grave of the Old Woman. That can be explained or not as the Story-teller likes, or the flowers may grow for ever in Pixy-land.

I have been telling the story for some years, and I have tried to write it as I tell it, which will account for its rather colloquial form and its many repetitions—the latter come much more easily with the spoken, than with the written word. I have done my best to give it as it sounds to me, but sound is not easy to convey by sight.

The beginning of the story needs to be very clear and definite and not at all hurried. It is

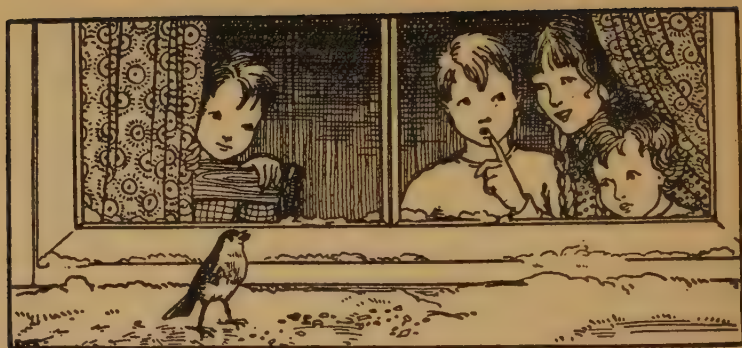
not "Once upon a time, there was an old woman who lived in a little white house," etc. It should be "Once upon a Time, there was an Old Woman, Who lived in a little White House. It had Two Windows, One on each side of the Door." So it continues, till the little house, the garden, and all its flowers stand clear. We are really setting the scene for our play. I have never found it necessary to hurry over this, or to slur the names of the flowers. The children love them all, and of course they may be added to or varied to suit the company of listeners. Then come the Tulips growing quietly and comfortably, till they shine before us in all their colours.

Now the action begins—one picture follows another and we see and share them all—the Tulips in the moonlight—the Pixy music—the Old Woman creeping down to the gate to listen—bending her old back to the Tulips, and so surprised and delighted—who wouldn't be?—at finding Pixy Babies tucked up in her Tulips! It is such a pleasant picture that I sometimes feel sorry the story does not end there, and I never dwell much on the uprooting of that garden! As to the vegetables—I admit they do not all grow at the same time, but they sound so nice and look so neat to the mind's eye!

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All this part of the story goes more quickly; there is less contemplation and more crisp action and a chuckle when you come to the Parsley! Then comes the winding-up of the tale, the carrying off and planting of the poor neglected flowers in the "safe place," where, I like to think, "they all lived happily ever after," and whence some of their descendants evidently strayed to gladden our hearts in the world to-day.

One word more. It may be objected—a child likes to be sure of its facts, and quite rightly—that I have not really provided for the Old Woman's December garden. But even in South Hampshire I have known sturdy old-fashioned Michaelmas Daisies linger till close on Christmas and have seen Monthly Roses in bloom all the year and yellow Aconites peeping out at Christmas-time. And this is a story of the warm West-country, so I think the Old Woman had her share!



XII

ROBIN REDBREAST'S THANKS-GIVING¹

It was an autumn morning. The sun was shining brightly, but the wind was cold, and there had been a little frost in the night; quite a shower of yellow leaves had come down and were lying all over the green grass. The dahlias looked pinched and hung their heads, and the robin felt puzzled. What could be going to happen?

He was a country robin, and when his robin papa and mamma had said, "Now you are grown up, be off and find food for yourself," he had

¹ Adapted from "Daily Bread," by Mrs. Alfred Gatty.

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flown away till he came to a large garden on the edge of a town. There he had stayed, all through July, August, and September. He was a quite-grown-up robin, but it was only about five months since he was a baby robin just out of the egg. That means, you see, that he first peeped out in April, and so he had never seen anything but a pleasant world with green leaves and flowers everywhere; plenty of caterpillars and other insects to eat, and warm sunshine to bask in.

An old tortoise lived in the garden, and he and the robin had been good friends, and had often chatted together in the long, sunny days of summer. But the tortoise was cross to-day. "Do be quiet," he said to the robin; "you sing so loud you make my head ache; and what there is to sing about I don't know, now that summer has gone!"

He had been busy all the morning at something the robin could not understand at all—digging and scratching with his little paws among some dry leaves that lay in a sunny corner, under a high old brick wall. The ground was soft there, and the tortoise had made quite a hole and had crawled in and out again several times. He seemed to want to sleep there. The robin

could not think why; always before, the tortoise had pulled his head into his shell and slept soundly just where he was, whenever he needed a nap. But to-day he never seemed to think of doing that; and as the robin watched with his little bright black eye and listened with his little brown head on one side, he heard the old tortoise talking to himself, as he scratched so busily, about something strange called "Winter." "Winter is coming," said the tortoise, "cold, cold winter. I must hurry—hurry—hurry!" And you know—and even the robin knew—it takes a great deal to make a tortoise think about hurrying!

"What is *winter*?" said the robin, when the tortoise stopped digging for a minute. "Don't interrupt me with foolish questions," said the tortoise. "You can see for yourself: the fruits and flowers are gone, the leaves are getting tough and dry, there is not a dandelion fit to eat, and the days are getting colder and colder, and damper and damper. There is nothing to sing so loud about, I can tell you!"

"But I am so happy," said the robin, "and when I am happy I can't help singing. Look at the sunshine; feel how warm it is, under this old wall. I have plenty to eat, and friends all

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round me." Just to think of it made the robin so happy that he flew to the branch of an old apple tree and sang his song all over again, looking like a little red apple himself among the withering leaves.

"Wait and see," said the tortoise grumpily; "wait till you wake up one morning and find the ground frozen hard and not a worm to be got. What will you sing about *then*?"

"I don't know," said the robin; "I don't know, friend tortoise; but as you say, I will wait and see, and meantime—



meantime—meantime——". And the robin was so afraid that he was going to vex the tortoise by singing again that he flew away and sang to the great bushes of lilac-coloured Michaelmas daisies, where the bees were still humming in the sunshine.

When he came back, the tortoise was better tempered. He had finished his digging; there

was a snug hole in the soft, dry earth, under the old brick wall. He was feeling so pleased and comfortable (and I think he was sorry he had been cross) that he actually invited the robin to share a corner. "Come in with me, little friend, and sleep till spring comes—with beautiful juicy green leaves and warm sunny days that grow longer and longer. Only you must promise not to sing, for I cannot be disturbed in my sleep," said the tortoise.

The robin's little black eye twinkled, and he hopped a little closer to look at the beautiful hole. "It is very kind of you," he said politely, "but I think perhaps I sleep best with my head under my wing, tucked away in the ivy, or in the crook of a bough."

"Very well—very well," said the tortoise kindly, "only take good care of yourself, little friend, and be sure you come and sing to me when I wake up in the spring: that is to say" (he said, with a sad sigh) "if you do not die of cold and hunger in the winter—dearie me, dearie me!" And he crawled into his hole under the warm, dry leaves, and was soon fast asleep.

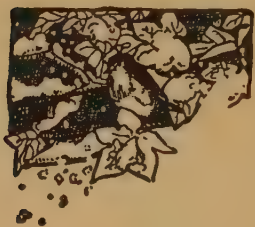
The robin missed the tortoise a good deal after that, and certainly the days did get shorter and the nights longer—and both grew colder

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and colder. Sometimes the sun hardly shone all day; the other birds were very quiet, some of them had gone quite away; there were very few insects to be found, but there were still berries to eat and warm corners in the ivy, and the robin still sang. The berries were so good and the ivy shelter was so cosy; the robin perched on the bare bough of the apple tree and sang his little song, and then flew to where the gardener was digging, and sang it over again. He was so warm and happy, he felt he *had* to sing!



But one morning—it was a little time before Christmas—he woke up and found everything very strange. It seemed dark, and the air was full of something falling, softly without a sound,



and something cold and white lay on the ivy leaves. The robin wondered if the tortoise had been right after all, and he cuddled down rather unhappily in his shelter and thought how dreadful

it would be if there was never anything to eat any more. Then he went to sleep again, and when he woke it was still very cold; all the garden was white, but the sun was shining, and everything was sparkling. The robin was so glad to see the sun again that he forgot how hungry he was. "Pr-r-r-t, Pr-r-r-t," he said, and he flapped his wings and fluffed his feathers to get rid of the snowflakes; and flying on to the old apple tree, he sang his very sweetest that cold, December morning.

Then he flew away to look for food, and just on the edge of a little fir plantation he found a holly tree all covered with bright red berries. He could see them plainly, quite a long way off, against the white snow, and so could a great many other birds. But there were plenty for all, and when he had breakfasted the robin flew to the warm shelter of the fir trees and sang, and then flew back for just another berry or two, and sang once more!

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It was very cold—terribly cold—for the next few days; the snow lay thick and the frost held fast. So many birds feasted at the holly tree that some branches were quite bare; and then came such a storm that for a whole night and day and another night the robin could not even put his little brown head out of his ivy shelter. Then the snow stopped and the robin peeped out and shook himself, unfolded his little wings, and flew straight to the holly tree. It was covered with snow, and the robin thought it looked smaller; there was not a sign of a red berry to be seen!

Poor little robin! He hopped anxiously from twig to twig, peeping under the leaves, but there was nothing to be found but cold, white snow and prickly, dark green leaves; and he was so *very* hungry. But on the snow, below the tree, he found one berry—just one. “Better one than none,” said the robin and he actually sang a note or two, he was so pleased. There were footmarks in the snow, and in one of them lay another red berry, and further on, two more. The robin hopped along, picking them up; the footmarks led to a large house, and that was the end of the berries. “Well, I have had some breakfast,” said the robin, “and breakfast is

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good." And he flew on to a rose bush and tidied his feathers and sang—and tidied them some more, and sang again.

Somebody came to a window of the big house and peeped out. "Oh, look, children!" she said, "there is a robin, and we have taken all his holly berries for our Christmas decorations. How kind of him to sing! We must give him some crumbs instead for a Christmas feast." And while the robin watched with his bright eyes, the window was pushed open, the window-ledge cleared of snow, and something sprinkled on it that smelt different from anything the robin knew, but very good indeed. Perhaps another day he might have been shy, but four berries are not much after two nights and a day with nothing to eat, and robin was too hungry to be afraid! He flew down on to the window-ledge and pecked at what was scattered there; it tasted very good indeed, and he pecked again. "Crumbs *are* good," said the robin, and he pecked till his little red waistcoat was quite puffed out, and then flew to the rose bush and sang, and came back and pecked again. Then he flew away, and sat on the branch of the old apple tree, near the tortoise's little hole, and sang very loud indeed to tell the tortoise all about it,

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just in case he could wake up and listen, on that Christmas morning.

Next day he went back to the window-ledge, and there were more crumbs; and the day after, and the day after that. There were no more hungry days for the robin; and every evening he would go and sing on the apple tree of the wonderful things that were happening—of the



crumbs, and the children, who scattered them, and the warm little shelter all lined with wool that they had made for him to sleep in, on cold, snowy nights. January came with frost and cold. February with sleet and rain, March with sunshine and stormy winds. The robin sang happily and thankfully through all. And one fine spring day, when the grass was long and green, with beautiful juicy green dandelions growing amongst it, and the sun was warm and

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the apple tree was in blossom, the old tortoise really did crawl out of his hole; and there sat the robin—singing.

He sang all the louder when he saw the tortoise, and told him all the wonderful things that had happened that winter. But the tortoise wouldn't believe a word! "I have been dreaming all manner of fine things myself," he said, and no doubt you have had a nap and dreamed too. Everyone knows that winter is cold and dark, and there is nothing to eat. But I am glad to see you so well, little friend. I can see a very nice dandelion over there." And he went away and ate it!

I am glad he found something to be pleased about, and he certainly had a snug winter. But I think I would rather be the robin than the tortoise, wouldn't you?

COMMENTS ON THE STORY

This story is very freely adapted from one of Mrs. Gatty's "Parables from Nature," entitled "Daily Bread."

I do not apologise, though one well might, for trying to adapt this story for telling to small children. It goes without saying that no adapta-

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tion can have the merit of the original (and if anyone who reads this does not know "Daily Bread," I strongly advise them to read it as soon as possible). But just as imitation is said to be "the sincerest flattery," so, in this case, adaptation is "the sincerest homage." I loved the story so much as a small child that I should like to help other children to love it also.

Now, the child will quite happily read—to *itself*—the whole of a long story, though there may be a good deal that is meant for older and more experienced minds. It puzzles out and gleans something all the way. But—for telling—a story must not be too long, and it must be comprehensible. There is no time for the listeners to ponder and puzzle, they must be in touch every moment. In cutting down, therefore, I have left out whole incidents and considerable moralising, but I have tried to aim at the spirit of the whole and to be guided by my remembrance of the story as it appeared to my small self. I think it has coloured all my acquaintance with robins since. I have tried to show the robin's cheerful thankfulness, all through that chequered year of his little life—sunny days and grey days alike brightened by his scarlet breast and cheerful song. Here and there I

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have enlarged a little, as in the case of robin himself. Some explanation seemed needed to help the children to understand his inexperienced outlook.

The story is so simple that very little advice seems necessary as to telling. It needs to be felt, and, as always, shared. Personally, I have always found it helpful to "see" the robin and a tortoise in a real garden that I know well. Most of us can do the same; and we can share all the more in the telling and feeling if we know the exact corner where the old tortoise lies, where and how the ivy grows in which the robin sleeps, and the very window where the crumbs were spread that snowy, Christmas morning.



XIII

THE STORY OF MOTHER FOX AND THE TIGER

FATHER FOX and Mother Fox lived in a burrow among some bushes on the edge of the forest. Father Fox was a very fine fellow with a sharp nose, a silky coat, bright eyes and a bushy tail. Mother Fox was not quite so big as Father Fox, but just as handsome; and really, if you and I had known them, I think we should have liked Mother Fox best. For to tell the truth, Father Fox was rather conceited; he had a great opinion of his own cleverness, and none at all of Mother Fox's; and whenever they argued about anything it always ended in Father Fox saying, "My dear, *you* mind the children and I'll do the rest. Remember, Mother Fox, *I* have enough cleverness to fill a whole cart, but *you* have only enough to fill a very small basket!" And no one could argue any more with a person who felt as clever as that—could he?

Father Fox and Mother Fox had five beautiful fox cubs, with silky coats, sharp noses, bright eyes and bushy tails. "Very handsome cubs, my dear," Father Fox would say. "What I cannot make up my mind about is, how many are like me and how many are like you. To tell the truth," said Father Fox, "they are all so clever and so beautiful, that I think they must all take after me!" Mother Fox did not think that was very nice of him, and she did not quite agree with him; but she knew what he would say if she argued (and we know too!). So she said nothing at all to him, and only thought to herself, "They are the most beautiful fox cubs in the world," which was all that really mattered.

But they were very hungry fox cubs; and Father Fox and Mother Fox had to work very hard at getting food for them. Not far away there was a village, and every night when the people of the village were fast asleep Father and Mother Fox used to creep out of their hole and prowl round to see what they could find. Sometimes they found scraps and bones that had been thrown away. Sometimes I am afraid they stole chickens, but they always came back with something. They had to go very quietly for fear the dogs in the village should wake up and chase

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them; besides there were wolves and tigers prowling about by night, all quite ready to eat up Father Fox and Mother Fox if they could catch them.

One night they were coming back from the village; they had both been hunting very busily, and Father Fox thought that the share of food which he had collected was much larger and finer



than what Mother Fox had found. He was so proud of it that he could not stop talking, and his voice (you and I would have called it a bark) got louder and louder, till Mother Fox said anxiously, "Father Fox, if you talk so loud the Tiger will hear you, and then what will become of us and the dear children's breakfast?" And Father Fox answered "Don't be so silly, my dear. If the Tiger does hear, I am far too clever to let him catch us. Remember, *I* have enough

cleverness to fill a very large cart, but *you* have only enough cleverness to fill a very small basket!"

Just as he said that, someone laughed close by in the darkness. It was not at all a nice laugh. You and I would have called it a growl; and a voice said, "Well, Father Fox, here I am, all ready to eat you and Mother Fox for my supper, unless, out of your cart-load of cleverness you manage to stop me!" And out from behind a bush walked a large black and yellow striped tiger.

It was what is called a "dreadful moment" for Father Fox, by which I mean that he was terribly surprised and frightened, and he simply could not find a single word to say, or think of a single thing to do, in spite of all his cartload of cleverness. He would have liked to run away, but he knew that was no use, for however fast he ran the tiger could catch him in two jumps. So he stood still and shook with fright—poor Father Fox!

Then—he could hardly believe it—he heard Mother Fox say quietly, "Oh, Uncle, how fortunate that we met. There is a question that greatly puzzles my husband and me, but one so wise as you can surely answer it for us." Now the tiger was very vain, and to be called "uncle"

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in his country is most honourable and respectful. He liked that and he liked to be called wise too. So he said in a purring voice, "No doubt I can help you. Before I eat you up, tell me your question, and I will answer it."

"Well, Uncle," said Mother Fox, "my husband and I have five beautiful cubs, and we cannot agree as to which are most like my husband and which are most like me, but if one so wise as yourself looked at them he could tell at once. Will you do us this great honour?"

The tiger was very pleased, and he said to himself, "I shall have foolish Father Fox and silly Mother Fox for my supper and five fat cubs as well!" So he answered very graciously, "Lead the way to your hole. Show me the cubs and I will settle the whole matter." And of course you know what he really meant to do!

"We will, Uncle, we will," said Mother Fox, and she and Father Fox trotted in front, and the tiger came prowling after. When they came to the burrow, brave Mother Fox said, "Father Fox, go down the hole and tell the dear children of the great honour that our kind Uncle Tiger is going to show them."

"Be quick," growled the tiger, and Father Fox *was* quick; he popped into the burrow and

was gone like a flash, and Mother Fox and the tiger waited by the hole. But if Father Fox was quick to go in he was not at all quick to come out! They waited a very long time, and nobody came—no Father Fox, no beautiful fat fox cubs. The tiger got more and more angry; he was tired of waiting, and he wanted his supper. "Where are your husband and the cubs?" he roared.



"Uncle," said Mother Fox, "if you will excuse me, I will go and see." "Tell them to be *quick*," growled the tiger. "Yes, Uncle," said Mother Fox, respectfully, and she

popped into the burrow and was gone in a minute, while the tiger sat and waited by the hole.

The time went by, and it seemed to the tiger a very long time indeed. It was getting near dawn, which is a tiger's bedtime, and he was terribly hungry. He was beginning to feel very angry indeed with Father and Mother Fox for keeping him waiting like this, when he heard a noise in the burrow and a little bark, and saw

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Mother Fox's wise little head and bright eyes peeping at him. "Oh, Uncle," said Mother Fox, "after all we need not have troubled you. Father Fox has settled the question. He says he never saw before how exactly like his beautiful and clever cubs are to his beautiful and clever wife. Is he not a good, kind husband?"

The tiger gave one angry snarl and clawed with his big paw at the mouth of the burrow, but Mother Fox was too quick. "Good-bye, Uncle," she said. Her bright eyes shone in the



dark, she wrinkled up her sharp nose, and laughed and whisked down the hole, and was gone—quite safe with Father Fox and the fat fox cubs. There was nothing left for the tiger to do but to go home to bed without any supper.

As for Father Fox and Mother Fox and the five fox cubs, they were all very happy. Father Fox stopped being quite so proud of himself, and was proud of his wife instead. "I have a wise and beautiful wife, and five beautiful

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children just like her—how fortunate I am!” said he. And I think he was—don’t you?

COMMENTS ON THE STORY

The original of “Mother Fox and the Tiger” is a folk tale—one from a jungle tribe in Southern India—and the bones of the story, so to speak, are just as I found them. I have only tried to make the story more clear and coloured for children’s eyes. Father Fox’s remark about the “cartload of cleverness,” which is the prop and mainstay of the story, is part of the original.

This weighty pronouncement occurs twice, and the children will probably insist on supplying it once more (in paragraph 2) after they have heard the story once: at least that is my experience. A fact which all storytellers need to realise is that the audience does not easily weary of a witty or absurd phrase, if only it be said with due expression and conviction, and not as if the teller was ashamed and embarrassed by its recurrence.

Father Fox’s favourite remark should be given decidedly and pompously. He is pompous in all his speeches—till he meets the tiger. Mother

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Fox is quiet and humble until her last speech, which has an exaggerated regret, and a chuckle at the end.

In looking at the story as it stands in print, the words "Father Fox" and "Mother Fox" seem to occur very often, but I have not found this repetition any disadvantage in telling. On the contrary, such repetition of names is an old trick of storytelling, and it seems to keep us familiar and friendly with the characters. Then too, the children like the sound, and sound is very important in a story which is meant for telling rather than reading.

One other point—an important one: it is worth noticing, in this story, that the real ending—to the grown-up mind—is directly after Mother Fox's reappearance and sly explanation. That is the climax and—to the grown-up—no more need be said. But with children it is otherwise. They love—who has not found it so?—to hear the story "to the very, very end." All must be finished and accounted for; and "Is that all?" is apt to be the child's blank response to the terse and dramatic ending which delights us more sophisticated folk. So we finish the story thoroughly and comfortably, dealing out justice with an even hand. The Tiger goes empty

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away; Mother Fox is safe and henceforward valued at her deserts; Father Fox is chastened and reformed and the five fat Fox cubs flourish. In short "they all lived happily ever after" and who could ask for more!



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